Uncertainty in Postmodern Literature:

With Special Reference to the Novels of Alasdair Gray and Salman Rushdie.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a selective study of Postmodern literature, focusing on the work of Alasdair Gray and Salman Rushdie. Postmodern literature is an expression of and response to the profound uncertainty that characterises the late-twentieth century. The works of many diverse authors attempt to come to terms with the Postmodern situation, which Jürgen Habermas has described as 'the legitimation crisis'. The Enlightenment metanarratives that legitimise Western, industrial societies, have been undermined by Capitalism and events. We no longer accept general metanarratives and this generates profound uncertainty.

As Postmodern literature challenges the incomplete certainties of grand-narratives, such as religious and political ideologies, it adopts uncertain forms. Texts create series of debates because these dramatise our conflicting uncertainties and our reluctance to accept set positions, and answers that erroneously claim to be universal and absolute. By presenting issues in conflict without offering a set conclusion, fiction is able to bring its readers actively into the arguments and find a role for itself within society.

The uncertainty of the present has contributed to an impression that we have lost a sense of connection with the past and future and therefore continuous identity. Postmodern novels tend to concentrate upon the struggles of the present in order to free the future from both restrictive traditional visions and the paralysing present. The future finally emerges as the direct product of the past and present, but we can also begin to imagine it as something radically different. Postmodern literature does not create new metanarratives, it legitimises a tense and provisional relationship with society that helps peoples to live in an uncertain world while not surrendering to it.

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DEDICATION

To Mum, Dad, Toby, Rachel, Zoë, James, Ron and James.

ABBREVIATIONS

BOOKS BY ALASDAIR GRAY

HM - A History Maker, by Alasdair Gray.

J - 1982, Janine, by Alasdair Gray.

L - Lanark: A Life in 4 Books, by Alasdair Gray.

PT - Poor Things, by Alasdair Gray.

BOOKS BY SALMAN RUSHDIE

G - Grimus, by Salman Rushdie.

GBHF - The Ground Beneath Her Feet, by Salman Rushdie.

HSS - Haroun and the Sea of Stories, by Salman Rushdie.

IH - Imaginary Homelands, by Salman Rushdie.

MC - Midnight's Children, by Salman Rushdie.

MLS –The Moor's Last Sigh, by Salman Rushdie.

S - Shame, by Salman Rushdie.

SV - The Satanic Verses, by Salman Rushdie.

OTHER BOOKS

LC - The Legitimation Crisis, by Jürgen Habermas.

PC - The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, by Jean-François Lyotard.

PE - The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985, by Jean-François Lyotard.

PF - Postmodernist Fiction, by Brian McHale.

INTRODUCTION:

FICTIONS ABOUT POSTMODERN LITERATURE

POSTMODERN LITERATURE AND UNCERTAINTY

Postmodern literature is an expression of and response to the profound uncertainty that characterises the late-twentieth century. The works of many diverse authors, including those of Salman Rushdie and Alasdair Gray, attempt to come to terms with the Postmodern situation, which Jürgen Habermas has described as 'the legitimation crisis'.[1] Rushdie also describes the Postmodern era as a time when, after 'the powerful, wealthy, confident certainties of the nineteenth century, the West has arrived at a moment beyond consensus, a fractured time, in which doubt, anxiety, and a kind of rudderlessness dominate life'.[2]

International multiculturalism, heterogeneity and the resulting uncertainty contribute to the generation of Postmodern society and literature. Vaclav Havel, playwright, political dissident and later President of Czechoslovakia, then of the Czech Republic, feels that we are living through a 'transitional period'[3] between the 'modern age' and what will replace it. Havel argues that 'a mixing and blending of cultures' distinguishes such periods. As a result:

> These are periods when all consistent value systems collapse [...] when there is a tendency to quote, to imitate, and to amplify, rather than to state with authority or integrate. New meaning is gradually

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[1] Jürgen Habermas, *The Legitimation Crisis*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (London: Heinemann, 1976), p.74. Orig. pub. (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1973). References hereafter to *LC* in the text.

[2] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), p.387. References hereafter to *IH* in the text.

[3] Vaclav Havel, *The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World*, http://newciv.org/worldtrans/whole/havelspeech.html. Orig. speech made in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, PA, USA, July 4 1994.

> born from the encounter, or the intersection, of many different elements.[4]

Global culture also brings global political and scientific problems, such as cultural clashes, terrorism, poverty and environmental damage, many of which seem too large for nation-states to solve successfully. During the latter half of the twentieth century the final disintegration of colonial empires and the collapse of communism have changed the 'artificial world order'. Global political structures which had been the foundation for many societies for decades crumbled, leaving considerable confusion in their wake.

Havel considers that disillusionment with rational science leaves people in a paradoxical position:

> We enjoy all the achievements of modern civilization that have made our physical existence on this earth easier. [...] Yet we do not know exactly what to do with ourselves, where to turn. The world of our experiences seems chaotic, disconnected, confusing. There appear to be no integrating forces, no unified meaning, no true inner understanding of phenomena in our experience of the world. Experts can explain anything in the objective world to us, yet we understand our own lives less and less. In short, we live in the postmodern world, where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain.

Science continues to discover more about how the world works, and yet society, especially western society, has lost the confidence to assign meanings to those explanations.

In these circumstances, Havel feels that 'the fewer answers the era of rational knowledge provides to the basic questions of human Being, the more deeply it would seem that people [...] cling to the ancient certainties of their tribe'. This is a plausible explanation for the revival of fundamentalist or charismatic religions and aggressive nationalism at the end of the twentieth century.

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[4] Havel, *Need for Transcendence*, havelspeech.html.

Rational thought is dominant, yet simultaneously it has become widely discredited:

> By day, we work with statistics; in the evening, we consult astrologers and frighten ourselves with thrillers about vampires. The abyss between rational and the spiritual, the external and the internal, the objective and the subjective, the technical and the moral, the universal and the unique, constantly grows deeper.[5]

Science and politics cannot bridge the gap, because they cannot address the frustrations that force the rift between logical thought and emotional desires ever wider. Perhaps one of the only ways to approach this gap is through literature, which carries out rational and intellectual investigations while addressing human emotional needs, dreams, ideals and desires. Literature cannot solve society's uncertainty, but it can both express and try to negotiate the divide.

Meanwhile, Rushdie believes that after the collapse of the Communist dictatorships, and presumably, the end of fascism, most Europeans are unlikely to support any other philosophy that claims to have the complete answer:

> This rejection of totalized explanations is the modern condition. And this is where the novel, the form created to discuss the fragmentation of truth, comes in. [...] The elevation of the quest for the Grail over the Grail itself, the acceptance that all that is solid *has* melted into air, that reality and morality are not givens but imperfect human constructs, is the point from which fiction begins. This is what J.-F. Lyotard called, in 1979, *La Condition Postmoderne*. The challenge of literature is to start from this point, and still find a way of fulfilling our unaltered spiritual requirements. (*IH*, p.422)

But simply demonstrating that the problem exists is not enough for Rushdie. He sees literature's role extending to mediation between the chaos of society and the paradoxical emotional and spiritual demands of readers.

According to Rushdie, religions and other widely accepted ideologies have offered a sense of the 'awesome experience' of life (p.421). This leads to a feeling

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[5] Havel, *Need for Transcendence*, havelspeech.html.

of identity, place and purpose; answers to the great unanswerable questions; and a set of codes to live by. Rushdie points out that 'the soul needs all these explanations—not simply rational explanations, but explanations of the heart' (*IH*, p.421). George Orwell attributed the popularity of Communism among English intellectuals in the 1930s to a similar need for a religious substitute:

> Patriotism, religion, the Empire, the family, the sanctity of marriage, the Old School Tie, birth, breeding, honour, discipline—anyone of ordinary education could turn the whole lot of them inside out in three minutes. But what do you achieve, after all, by getting rid of such primal things as patriotism and religion? You have not necessarily got rid of the need for *something to believe in.*[6]

Postmodern novels, in Rushdie's opinion, give new pictures of the state of society. They replace heroes and prophets with uncertain wanderers, lacking settled identities or place. They find that answers are 'easier to come by, and less reliable, than questions' and that 'there are no rules. [...] We have to make up our own rules as best we can [...] as we go along' (*IH*, p.423). Rushdie describes this message as both 'harsh and unpalatable news' (p.423) and crucial to confront in order to cope with the Postmodern situation.

Literature is the best method of dealing with the current loss of absolutes, claims Rushdie. Since 'if religion is an answer, if political ideology is an answer, then literature is an inquiry; great literature, by asking extraordinary questions, opens new doors in our minds' (p.423). Rushdie suggests that literature offers readers ways of approaching their spiritual demands by presenting the fullest possible picture of the confusion and uncertainty of Postmodern society. Instead

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[6] George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), I, *An Age Like This 1920-40*, pp.493-527 (p.515). Orig. pub. *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, 1940.

of searching for new certainties, Rushdie advocates changing our perspective and focusing on the process of finding truths.

By attempting to understand and appreciate the nature of Postmodern society, readers may be able to find new ways of making sense of the world. The Marxist theorist, Fredric Jameson, describes the creation of new mental pictures of Postmodern society as 'cognitive mapping'.[7] He hopes that these cognitive maps will enable readers 'to grasp our positioning as individuals and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion' (p.54). With new understandings of the world, readers may take control of it.

Karl Marx famously argued that there are inherently destabilising forces within capitalist society:

> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. [...] All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air.[8]

Rushdie holds that now 'all that is solid *has* melted into air' (*IH*, p.422), and that the current 'postmodern condition'[9] theorised by Jean-François Lyotard is a result of this destabilisation. Both Habermas and Lyotard have analysed Postmodern society and uncertainty, and their fierce arguments have been some of the most important contributions to the Postmodern debate.

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[7] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p.54.

[8] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Manifesto of the Communist Party', trans. by Samuel Moore, in *Karl Marx: An Essay with the Communist Manifesto*, essay by Harold J. Laski (New York: League for Industrial Democracy, 1933, (1850)), pp.59-94 (p.63). Orig. pub. (Germany: 1848).

[9] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Theory and History of Literature, 10 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.xxiv. Orig. pub. (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979). References hereafter to *PC* in the text.

THE LEGITIMATION CRISIS

David Harvey, another Marxist theorist, points out that 'capital is a process and not a thing'.[10] Capitalism is an economic system that is constantly changing in order to survive, not an ideological, philosophical or political movement. But in *The Legitimation Crisis* Habermas agrees with Marx that capitalist economic systems need social systems in order to replicate themselves and continue. However, Habermas argues that economic and political systems can evolve faster than the social systems that support them, leaving these different systems out of step.

The social system develops its justifications and motivations organically, and the Establishment cannot deliberately or quickly change it to provide new justifications for the economic and political systems. When the social system fails to provide such justifications this translates into a 'withdrawal of legitimation' and 'legitimation crises' occur (*LC*, p.48). Habermas feels that this has indeed happened to contemporary capitalism.

The particular justifications that advanced capitalism have weakened are traditional, western, visions of the world, including Christian orthodoxies and especially the ideals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Capitalism adopted these models to foster its own economic ends, through the promotion of ideas such as the work ethic and progress. Western industrial society used the philosophy of the Enlightenment to promote capitalism until capitalism began to find these ideals limiting rather than productive.

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[10] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p.343.

But although the existing social system is increasingly unable to give persuasive backing to the rapidly mutating political and economic systems, it continues to produce justifications. Habermas maintains that scientific belief and demanding high art, together with surviving moral philosophies 'form a normative framework that is dysfunctional' (*LC*, p.49). These unsynchronised social systems create the justifications for societies that can no longer exist, and which are in direct conflict with contemporary materialist capitalism.

Because 'motivations important for continued existence can in no way be produced entirely independently of these enfeebled, or only limitedly effective, cultural traditions' (p.79) the oppositional counter-cultures which are produced instead cannot be ignored. Dysfunctional social systems create justifications for opposing the establishment, and the residual authority of this process blocks the production of new justifications for the establishment.

Legitimation crises, according to Habermas, are expressed 'only through the socio-cultural system. For the social integration of a society is dependent on the output of this system' (p.48). Literature and culture have a very important role since they exclusively express the current legitimation crisis. They articulate the opposition to contemporary capitalism and the political establishment, and the profound uncertainty that results from the weakening of traditional justifications.

HABERMAS AND ENLIGHTENMENT MODERNITY

Habermas is deeply concerned with what he sees as a great threat to the aims and ideals of the Enlightenment, which justify his humanitarianism, from the legitimation crisis. Enlightenment thinkers tried to create 'a secular movement

that sought the demystification and desacralization of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate human beings from their chains'.[11]

Enlightenment philosophers supported the ideas of scientific and technological progress, creativity and rational thought in an attempt to escape from the intellectual tyranny of superstitions, myths and limiting religious dogmas. Scholars tried 'to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic',[12] in order to bring real advances and rights to all humanity. Thinkers began to study these disciplines separately in order to liberate their specific potential. Habermas describes this as 'the project of modernity' (p.165).

However, according to Habermas, Enlightenment thinkers:

> still had the extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces but also understanding of the world and of the self, moral progress, the justice of institutions and even the happiness of human beings. The 20th century has shattered this optimism. (p.165)

Events such as the two world wars destroyed the illusion of linear, civilised progress. Not only did science become increasingly remote from human experience, but also scientific discoveries, such as the nuclear bomb, did not necessarily lead to greater happiness or understanding. Scientific exploration increasingly appears to proceed without reference to moral or ethical issues. Other theories, such as evolution, the unconscious mind, relativity and quantum mechanics, contradict the linear rationality upon which the Enlightenment founded itself.

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[11] Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, p.13.

[12] Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project', in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. by Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1992), pp.160-70 (p.165). Orig. pub. as 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter 1981), 3-14.

Philosophers, such as Horkheimer and Adorno, also accused the Enlightenment of startling internal contradictions. According to Harvey their thesis holds that 'the logic that hides behind Enlightenment rationality is a logic of domination and oppression'.[13] Horkheimer and Adorno felt that when society starts trying to dominate nature, it ends up oppressing other people.

The division of science, art and law has continued. Each area is now so specialised that experts can no longer explain their advances to experts in other parts of their own fields, let alone to the rest of society. Habermas feels that this generates hostility to intellectualism and causes 'efforts to "negate" the culture of expertise'.[14] Experts are alienating themselves from society instead of advancing it, and further discrediting the notion of rationality.

As the Enlightenment has been discredited, so have its methods of rationality and universality, and although its ideals of equality and civilisation are still commonly respected, there is no commonly agreed method of achieving them. Habermas feels that the project of modernity has 'not yet been fulfilled' (p.169) because we have not achieved the goals of the Enlightenment. In the present climate, he wonders if we should 'try to hold on to the *intentions* of the Enlightenment, feeble as they may be, or should we declare the entire project of modernity a lost cause?' (p.165).

Habermas feels that society should follow the former course and try to continue the project of modernity, but 'we should learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programs which have tried to negate modernity' (pp.167-68). Rather than abandoning reason and specialisation, they can be rehabilitated, according to

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[13] Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, p.13.
[14] Habermas, 'Modernity', p.165.

Habermas, by making new connections between professional and amateur thinkers, including critics and readers of literature. But we can only achieve this if society can limit and control the economic and political systems that are developing in quite different and autonomous directions. Habermas recognises that 'the chances for this today are not very good',[15] since it is unlikely that fragmented societies can control the forces of capitalism.

Habermas understandably wishes to preserve the project of modernity because he sees it as the only guarantee of achieving the ideals of the Enlightenment. However, it is clear that the culture of autonomous knowledge has failed to generate the society that the eighteenth-century philosophers expected. Rather than trying to reform the project so radically that it in fact reverses it, perhaps contemporary thinkers should find new ways of approaching and thinking about those still respected ideals. Finding those new methods is not easy, and made doubly difficult without a consensus.

Habermas indirectly expresses this difficulty through his attacks on what he sees as reactionary forces in society. Conservatives, according to Habermas, use the failure of the project of modernity as an excuse to attack the very foundations and values of that project. Anyone who works against or away from the project of modernity risks being labelled by Habermas as a conservative. He sees trends critical of cultural modernism, as well as of philosophical modernism, as 'a pretense for conservative positions' (p.169).

Habermas argues, for instance, that Poststructuralists, including Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, are 'young conservatives' who justify an 'irreconcilable antimodernism' (p.169) and 'claim as their own the revelations of

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[15] Habermas, 'Modernity', p.169.

a decentered subjectivity'.[16] They oppose 'instrumental reason' and celebrate irrational forces such as 'the spontaneous powers of the imagination, self-experience and emotion' (p.169).

Habermas cannot bring himself to abandon rational thought, or the ideals of universal human rights and values, since he feels that this means surrendering to one of the brands of conservatism that he defines. It is important to remember that Habermas is a German intellectual, who saw the results of the suspension of rational Modernity in Nazi Germany. Now he is defending the hard won rights and freedoms of post-war Germany in the face of continuing anti-Modern attacks. Habermas defends the ideals of the Enlightenment not as abstract concepts but, according to Andreas Huyssen, as 'the *sine qua non* of political democracy'.[17]

LYOTARD AND THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

The accusation that Poststructuralists are 'young conservatives' provoked outrage, and Habermas was himself labelled a conservative for supporting an old-fashioned notion of reason. Lyotard's work on Postmodern culture is in part a reply to Habermas's provocation. In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard examines the state of scientific and philosophical knowledge 'in the context of the crisis of narratives' (*PC*, p.xxiii).

This crisis is the legitimation crisis of Habermas's account, which produces the Postmodern condition. Lyotard defines the '*postmodern*' impulse in contemporary western society as 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (p.xxiv). In a later work Lyotard explains that 'by metanarratives or grand narratives, I mean precisely

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[16] Habermas, 'Modernity', p.169.

[17] Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (London: MacMillan, 1988, (1986)), pp.178-221 (p.201). Orig. pub. *New German Critique*, 33 (1984), 5-52.

narrations with a legitimating function';[18] narratives which philosophically justify social, economic and political structures.

The Enlightenment metanarratives which have affected western society since the eighteenth century are different from older legitimating ideas. According to Lyotard:

> like myths, they have the goal of legitimating social and political institutions and practices. [...] Unlike myths, however, they look for legitimacy, not in an original founding act, but in a future to be accomplished, that is, an Idea to be realized. This Idea [...] has legitimating value because it is universal. (p.18)

Enlightenment metanarratives are future-oriented, rather than based on a founding act. The most important aspect of Enlightenment reason for Lyotard is that it can only function as universal if it dominates and represses other philosophies and methods.

While Habermas desperately seeks to reinvigorate the project of modernity, seeking civilisation through intellectual progress, Lyotard blames it for the horrors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He considers that 'neither liberalism (economic and political) nor the various Marxisms have emerged from these bloodstained centuries without attracting accusations of having perpetrated crimes against humanity' (pp.77-78).

In an appendix added to the English translation of *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard specifically replies to Habermas's defence of universal reason. Lyotard concludes that 'we have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole

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[18] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985*, ed. by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas, trans. by Don Barry and others (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.19. Orig. pub. (Paris: Galiée, 1986). References hereafter to *PE* in the text.

and the one. [...] The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality'.[19] Lyotard equates rationality with brutal repression so welcomes the general disillusionment with reason per se and goes on to suggest an alternative strategy for organising society. Rather than wishing to return to the certainties of Enlightenment thinking, he demands that society accepts and exploits its new uncertain Postmodern situation in order to avoid new repressions.

Lyotard sees the crisis of narratives both as a chance to escape from the tyranny of metanarratives and as providing a positive and creative leap into 'many different language games—a heterogeneity of elements' (*PC*, p.xxiv). While Habermas warns of the dangers for human rights inherent in the loss of consensus, Lyotard celebrates its creative potential, because 'invention is always born of dissension'. (p.xxv) He champions the freedom of the 'local determinism' (p.xxiv) of new 'incommensurable' (p.xxv) language games, and promotes a 'quest for parology' (p.66).

Parology is the strategy that will drive the future development of reason. Steven Connor describes it as 'faulty or deliberately contradictory reasoning, designed to shift and transform the structures of reason itself'.[20] Lyotard sees the continuing separation and growing autonomy of different branches of knowledge, such as science, ethics and art, increasing the production of knowledge that conflicts with rather than complements the knowledge of other areas. Continuing

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[19] Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', trans. by Regis Durand, Appendix to the English trans. of *The Postmodern Condition*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp.71-82 (pp.81-82). Pub. in *Innovation/Renovation: New Perspectives on the Humanities*, ed. by Ihab Hassan and Sally Hassan (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). Orig. pub. in French, *Critique*, 419 (April 1982).

[20] Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, (1989)), p.29.

development of these diverging knowledges may change the very nature of knowledge itself.

While Habermas's project may well be unrealistic in the face of the legitimation crisis, Lyotard's search for parology seems equally unlikely to produce the effect that he hopes. Connor described Lyotard's trust in the positive effects of diversity as romantic.[21] Lyotard's own assessment of the developing autonomous knowledges is that they are being exploited by capitalists rather than intellectuals, and the uncertain situation 'far from reducing the inequality of wealth in the world, exacerbates it' (*PE*, p.36).

Lyotard's own condemnation of universal values seems to deprive his theory of any authority since he cannot explain why his theory is more valuable than any other is. However, these theories also betray his reliance on two hidden metanarratives: the grand narrative of the end of grand narratives and a narrative of finding value in parology's subversion of capitalism.

Jameson argues that both these narratives suggest 'that something beyond capitalism is possible, something radically different; and they also "legitimate" the praxis whereby political militants seek to bring that radically different future social order into being'.[22] The problem is that using any form of narrative is dangerous for a philosophy that attacks all legitimation. All narratives justify themselves on some level, even if they try to be, in Terry Eagleton's words, 'mysteriously self-derivative, absolutely self-guaranteeing' stories.[23]

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[21] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.29.
[22] Fredric Jameson, 'Forward', in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, by Jean-François Lyotard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp.vii-xxi (p.xix).
[23] Terry Eagleton, 'Awakening from Modernity', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 February 1987, 194.

Parology is also a dangerous strategy because it privileges the same form of purely performative logic that currently underlies capitalist economics. Eagleton firmly links such unmotivated intellectual diversity with capitalist eclecticism:

> It is not surprising that classical models of truth and cognition are increasingly out of favour in a society where what matters is whether you deliver the commercial or rhetorical goods. [...] The goal is no longer truth but performativity, not reason but power.[24]

Capitalism has abandoned all justification except its founding notion of pragmatic materialism; nothing else matters except being economically successful and generating more money. Lyotard's theory parallels this by suggesting that nothing matters except generating more analysis.

Jameson rescues Lyotard from the danger of looking like an apologist for capitalism by claiming that Lyotard's continual use of narratives in an impossible situation 'is his declaration of intent to remain political and contestatory'.[25] Lyotard's conscious use of narrative, which always suggests justification, against metanarratives and justification, marks his self-conscious and ironic opposition to the current system from within that system.

Continuing attempts by critics, including Habermas and Lyotard, to criticise capitalism and to find acceptable grounds to legitimate values, indicate that the metanarratives of the Enlightenment are not extinct, but are now competing, as 'dysfunctional' motivations (*LC*, p.49). The Enlightenment goals of freedom and human rights are still widely respected and valued. Indeed, many intellectuals seem to envy the certainty of past ages, while all too often critics attempt to create

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[24] Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986), pp.131-47 (p.134). Orig. pub. *New Left Review*, 152 (July-August 1985), 60-73.

[25] Jameson, 'Forward', p.xx.

limited, localised legitimation, which they hope will be helpful even to Postmodern society.

Jameson feels that the current contradictory trend of using narratives to justify concepts, even provisionally, while also acknowledging the legitimation crisis can be explained .

> by taking a further step that Lyotard seems unwilling to do, [...] namely to posit, not the disappearance of the great master-narratives, but their passage underground as it were, their continuing but now *unconscious* effectivity as a way of 'thinking about' and acting in our current situation.[26]

The Enlightenment metanarratives are still deeply influential in forming judgements in Postmodern society; however, they cannot form or justify a complete system of thought any more. The twentieth century is the Post-Enlightenment era, still living through the consequences of those earlier ideas.

The lingering authority of the Enlightenment metanarratives prevents the creation of any new justifications. Reason and logic have paradoxically been used to prove that they cannot be used to authorise human rights and values, and now function only to deconstruct any potential alternative legitimations. Since a radical new belief system has to grow organically out of the demands of society to be successful, it is impossible to ignore these virtual justifications or to replace them artificially.

These once powerful narratives now conflict with each other, with capitalist society, with Post-Enlightenment narratives and with metanarratives from other traditions. However, there are no generally acceptable or rational grounds to judge between them. Many people still believe in some or others of the many conflicting metanarratives, but even the

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[26] Jameson, 'Forward', p.xii.

most fanatical believers are unable to ignore the presence and opposition of other, equally persuasive ideologies.

Habermas and Lyotard represent extreme positions in the debate about the loss of legitimation of Enlightenment ideas, but they are from different traditions and are not always arguing about the same subject. The enlightened modernism which Habermas defends is 'purged of modernism's nihilistic and anarchic strain'.[27] But this selective view of modernism as enlightened reason is too restricted, since it fails to appreciate the limitations and history of philosophical Modernism, the development of the Postmodern situation and the nature of Modernist and Postmodernist literature and art.

Lyotard's definition of modernity comes from the French tradition. Here Modernism is primarily an aesthetic question dealing with 'the energies released by the deliberate destruction of language and other forms of representation'[28] rather than an ethical structure. For Lyotard, the aesthetic impulses that artists and critics deal with are not anti-humanitarian because they are irrational, as Habermas believes them to be, but profoundly liberating because they challenge restrictive traditions.

But Lyotard's total rejection of reason, and the subsequent embrace of irrationality is also limited and 'politically dangerous',[29] as Habermas claims. Jameson detects, for instance, a form of inverted, idealistic Utopianism of almost religious proportions in the hysterical distrust of any total or idealistic thought in the work of Lyotard and other Poststructuralists.[30] However, it is also clear that Lyotard has not abandoned himself to meaningless or superstitious ravings, or

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[27] Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', p.200.
[28] Ibid., p.203.
[29] Ibid., p.203.
[30] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.402.

destructively irrational politics. Although he rejects the notion of reason, he does so for the most logical reasons, and in the most rational manner.

Habermas and Lyotard often argue at cross-purposes, since, as Jameson notes, Lyotard's:

> commitment to the experimental and the new [...] determine an aesthetic that is far more closely related to the traditional ideologies of high modernism proper than to current postmodernisms, and is indeed —paradoxically enough—very closely related to the conception of the revolutionary nature of high modernism that Habermas faithfully inherited from the Frankfurt School.[31]

In the end Habermas and Lyotard seem to come together to celebrate a similar form of modernism, though they arrive from very different directions.

Habermas and Lyotard's contributions to the Postmodern debate are immense, through their failures and unfinished projects, as well as through their insights into the Postmodern condition. Their work defines many of the arenas of the Postmodern debate, and represents attempts to deal with the dilemmas of the Post-Enlightenment, Postmodern condition. But the paradoxes they cannot resolve also dramatise those dilemmas.

THE VALUES OF POSTMODERN LITERATURE

The crisis of legitimation and capitalist destabilisation create a crisis of representation at the deepest level, which threatens both society's and the individual's sense of identity. Postmodern literature is part of the attempt to negotiate this crisis and find some sort of identity without subscribing to former myths. But Postmodern identities are not disguised versions of old certainties, they are forged by recognising the end of such certainties and unquestioned

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[31] Jameson, 'Forward', p.xvi.

identities, and then attempting to create new, flexible, even contradictory and plural identities. Since this is a highly complicated and arguably impossible task, Postmodern fiction tends to explore the attempt to create new identities, rather than express any final solution to the problem.

The reluctance to commit oneself to a fixed position is prevalent in Postmodern thought. Writers and critics, like Lyotard, tend to operate as if they feared that the inevitable collision between different ideas that claim to offer true answers within the same society could only lead to conflict and repression. This reluctance to make judgements virtually paralyses Linda Hutcheon's literary criticism, to which I shall return later.

Rushdie captures this Postmodern position by quoting Luis Buñuel's comment: 'I would give my life for a man who is looking for the truth. But I would gladly kill a man who thinks that he has found the truth'.[32] Rushdie self-consciously quotes this while in hiding from a death sentence imposed in 1989 by the Iranian Islamic fundamentalist leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, for supposed blasphemy in *The Satanic Verses*.[33] His situation forcefully shows that indecision and hopeful tolerance is no protection against the aggressive certainties of others.

John Mepham points out 'to say "I love you" ironically is easy. What is it to work, marry, have children, go to war, ironically, with no grand narratives in support?'.[34] The Postmodern condition is fraught with the danger of leading to a pseudo-Darwinian social anarchy where strong, intolerant, irrationalisms always dominate tolerant, unfocused rationality because tolerance cannot even rationalise

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[32] Luis Buñuel, reported by Carlos Fuentes, 'Words Apart', *Guardian*, *Review*, Friday 24 February 1989, pp.29-30 (p.29).
[33] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking, 1988). References hereafter to *SV* in the text.
[34] John Mepham, 'Narratives of Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. by Edmund J. Smyth (London: Batsford, 1991), pp.138-155 (pp.154-55).

the grounds to defend itself. The Postmodern debate, to which literature and criticism contribute, constantly faces this problem, as it tries to create identities which can cope with the pressures of the Postmodern condition.

The fiction of Salman Rushdie and Alasdair Gray, and other works of Postmodern literature, try to negotiate the uncertainty of the Legitimation Crisis by engaging in the artistic, philosophical, political, economic and moral debates of contemporary Postmodern society. In the course of conducting those debates Postmodern fiction attempts to challenge the materialist perception that fiction has no practical value except to provide entertainment, escapism, or comforting reassurance for its readers. These works try to forge new roles and new perspectives for literature.

Postmodern uncertainty is the cause of much anxiety, but is not an entirely negative phenomenon. Rushdie argues that:

> This loss of certainty has been in many ways—for example, in the arts—of great value. Just as an atom, when split, releases colossal energy, so the old, rigid orthodoxies of colonial Europe produced, by being broken, the unparalleled outburst of newness and excitement that the modernist movement has been. (*IH*, pp.387-88)

Havel also sees the eclectic mixtures of cultures and styles as potentially positive:

> as proof that something is happening, something is being born, that we are in a phase when one age is succeeding another, when everything is possible. Yes, everything is possible, because our civilization does not have its own unified style, its own spirit, its own aesthetic.[35]

While uncertainty leaves people feeling insecure and vulnerable, it also releases new energies by combining ideas in new ways, and allowing new perspectives to be developed which would previously have been impossible.

Connor argues that:

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[35] Havel, *The Need for Transcendence*, havelspeech.html.

> the postmodernism debate [...] reflects and embodies the real involvement of cultural criticism in what Jürgen Habermas has called the 'legitimation crisis' which affects contemporary social life – the fact that there no longer seems to be access to principles which can act as criteria of value for anything else. From now on [...] there are no absolute grounds of value which can compel assent. But in such a situation, questions of value and legitimacy do not disappear, but gain a new intensity.[36]

As all established set of values lose their persuasive authority, people become more, not less, anxious to discover or create meaningful values which reflect their new society.

Even amid Postmodern confusion, Connor considers that 'value is inescapable' because 'the processes of *evaluation*, can never be avoided'.[37] He argues that:

> we should acknowledge that value and evaluation are necessary as a kind of law of human nature and being, such that we cannot help but enter the play of value, even when we would wish to withdraw from or suspend it. (p.8)

He defines value as 'the irreducible principle of generalized positivity, the inescapable pressure to identify and identify with whatever is valuable rather than what is not valuable' (p.2).

The imperative of value is the restless force that continually demands that people weigh every aspect of their lives. This force 'is not only distinct from the operation of particular values, it is opposed to it. This is because the imperative dimension commands that we continue evaluating in the face of every apparently stable and encompassing value in particular' (pp.2-3).

The imperative to value is a universal aspect of human existence, but becomes increasingly obvious at times when formerly stable value systems are challenged. Many people in the west would find the 'desirability of universal freedom [...]

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[36] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.8.
[37] Steven Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.8.

hard to dispute, but universal freedom (like universal anything) must include within it the freedom to question and criticize its own nature'.[38] Connor asks, 'could a form of freedom that forbade the willed choosing of slavery really be freedom?' (p.3).

Universal freedom demands the freedom of all from slavery, but paradoxically also includes the freedom for all to keep slaves. Connor demonstrates that our principle of universal freedom, and by extension, all our principles, involve many compromises. In reality 'the values that we prize come into being because of acts of energetic, painful appraisal; values are the sedimental deposits of the imperative to value' (p.3).

Literary values are neither wholly absolute nor relative, but emerge from the continuous process of evaluation:

> while literature and literary value cannot be said to exist *in themselves*, intransitively and unconditionally, nevertheless they have a contingent or historical existence. This is to say that 'literature' is the same kind of category as the categories 'weeds', 'vermin' or 'aliens' – the occupants of such categories being defined not by the intrinsic qualities they possess but by their meaning and value for the particular speakers, groups ('interpretive communities') or societies for whom the categories have force. (p.22)

The contradictory definitions of Postmodern literature demonstrate this principle, as Postmodernism becomes whatever each theorist wishes. The exceptionally fluid nature of Postmodern literature allows it to be one of the arenas where 'acts of energetic, painful appraisal' (p.3) can interrogate and possibly generate values.

New forms of artistic and philosophical value can be seen arising out of the Legitimation Crisis. But new values conflict with older ideologies and metanarratives as it becomes harder to find commonly accepted grounds to justify beliefs. This is especially apparent in the developed West, where the Crisis of

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[38] Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value*, p3.

Legitimation originated. But since economics, politics, mass communications and environmental concerns are now global, cultures with different metanarratives and different levels of 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (*PC*, p.xxiv) are increasingly thrust together. No society can escape from the Postmodern uncertainty that these cultural clashes bring.

Postmodern novels are not all interested in the same questions of value, nor do they apply the same techniques to investigate such questions. However, some notable controversies have demonstrated that one of the most valuable functions of Postmodern literature is in highlighting those cultural clashes and debates where different value systems are in conflict. These complex and contradictory areas demonstrate the current limits of society's thoughts, identity and nature. These clashes are also where conflicting value systems might produce new accommodations and therefore new values, if not new metanarratives, in the future.

Postmodern novels use the energy released by uncertainty to confront society with its troubles rather than comforting it with false certainties. By aggressively entering the areas that deal with peoples' deepest beliefs, emotions and fears, and which are the most violently contested, Postmodern novels try to be participants rather than passive observers in society's debates. However, Postmodern novels cannot control the way that they are received, and by deliberately becoming participants, they place themselves and their authors in the very heart of many controversies.

In 'What is an Author?' Michael Foucault asserts that 'texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors (other than mythical, 'sacralized' and 'sacralizing' figures) to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that

is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive'.[39] Rushdie agrees *'that authors were named only when it was necessary to find somebody to blame'* (*IH*, p.424).

Foucault explains that discourses needed named authors because:

> In our culture (and doubtless in many others), discourse was not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods; it was essentially an act—an act placed in a bipolar field of the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous. Historically, it was a gesture fraught with risks.[40]

It is highly doubtful whether literature has ever been perceived exclusively as a product that could not transgress accepted social boundaries. However, when Postmodern novels move to the centre of raw ethical and cultural debates they again place themselves squarely in a field between the sacred and the profane.

As society becomes more disillusioned with the Enlightenment Metanarratives, ethical and cultural consensus is increasingly fragmented. With different, contradictory metanarratives claiming to be sacred, producing literature becomes ever more fraught with the possibility of transgression. It has become impossible to avoid conflicting with some metanarrative or another. Since Postmodern novels actively seek to challenge dogmatic faith in certainty and metanarratives, these novels deliberately court strong reactions.

Large numbers of people do not want their fragile but desperately held certainties about literature or society challenged and consider Postmodern literature to be both bad art and ideologically dangerous. Terry Eagleton describes how businessmen wholeheartedly support the disruptive 'pleasure and plurality'

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[39] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. and trans. by Josue V. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp.141-60 (p.148). Orig. talk at SUNY-Buffalo, rev. version pub. *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, 63 (1969), France.
[40] Ibid., p.148.

of the Capitalist free-market. But they 'have heard all about deconstruction and react to it much as religious fundamentalists do to atheism [...] since in its more politicized forms deconstruction is indeed an assault on much of what most businessmen hold dear'.[41] Postmodern literature often uses deconstruction to challenge what remains of the social justifications that support Western capitalism.

Charles Newman believes that the 'absence of sympathy between the artist and his audience is the major *continuity* between Modernism and Post-Modernism, a destructiveness [...] *pushed just a little bit further*, an almost unconscious escalation of hostilities'.[42] Newman claims that Postmodern literature deliberately attacks its audience along with their conventions. While radical formal experimentation is no longer surprising, it is still possible to create fictions that are unacceptable to many people by challenging non-formal conventions. High Modernist fiction, for instance, challenged the forms and conventions of realist literature, but also introduced subjects that are more unromantic, as a means of confronting their audience's expectations and beliefs, and engaging in different aspects of modernity.

Radical forms of writing are no longer unusual and Postmodern texts challenge readers' most fundamental perceptions of their identity and nature by exploring contemporary subjects that are increasingly more emotional and visceral than traditional ones. But because readers have 'discounted in advance all possibility of being shocked, it is the writer who is often left holding the toxic bag of his latest *catastrophisme*. His aggressiveness is in direct proportion to the coolness of his

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[41] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.132.
[42] Charles Newman, *The Postmodern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation* (Evanston, WY: Northwestern University Press, 1985), p.20.

audience'.[43] Postmodern literature has to try much harder to shock its prepared audience. But since shock is a subjective and historically relative measure, it is impossible to tell whether literature is actually more shocking now than in the past.

Umberto Eco has said that 'I wanted the reader to enjoy himself, at least as much as I was enjoying myself'.[44] While reading *The Name of the Rose*[45] 'the reader was to be diverted, but not di-verted, distracted from problems'.[46] Eco challenges the elitist view that 'if a novel was popular, this was because it said nothing new and gave the public only what the public was already expecting' (p.60).

Many novels become popular, but popularity is not synonymous with escapism. Eco points to Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*[47] as examples of challenging novels which became very popular by not giving the public what it expected. The value of art, especially radical and challenging art, has been in question for most of the century. The result of this constant argument is that not even artists and writers are sure what value art has, nor what sort of audience to expect.

Eco describes how, in the sixties, 'experimental works, novels that caused scandal and were rejected by the mass audience, were praised' automatically by some writers, including himself.[48] However, as literature continued to challenge

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[43] Newman, *Postmodern Aura*, p.98.
[44] Umberto Eco, *Postscript to 'The Name of the Rose'*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), p.59. Orig. pub. (Italy: 1983).
[45] Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983). Orig. pub. (Italy: Fabbri-Bompiani, 1980).
[46] Eco, *Postscript*, p.59.
[47] Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Secker & Warburg, 1962), orig. pub. (Germany: Hermann Luchterhand, 1959); and Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (London: Picador, Pan, 1978, (1970)), orig. pub. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Editorial Sudamericana,1967).
[48] Eco, *Postscript*, p.61.

its audiences, with both form and content, audiences came to expect and to enjoy being challenged. Eco notes that 'what had been dissonance a few years before was turning into a balm for the ears (or for the eyes)'.[49]

Eco felt he had to rethink his ideas since the relationship of the audience to his texts was changing. Authors and artists have to deal with the phenomenon that some audiences now expect to be challenged and that many now enjoy the process rather than being shocked. Eco decided that 'only one conclusion could be drawn: unacceptability of the message was no longer the prime criterion for an experimental fiction' (p.63).

POSTMODERN NARRATIVES

The Postmodern condition has stripped the disguise of rhetorical authority away from metanarratives. The Postmodern debate has forced writers, readers and critics to recognise that reality and truth are 'imperfect human constructs' (*IH*, p.422). This is especially true when dealing with metanarratives about Postmodern literature.

Literary movements only exist in the imagination of readers and critics, since they represent the relationships between texts created by those readers. Additionally, Postmodern literature highlights the fictionality of its own myths and construction as well as the fictionality of other ideologies and truths. When examining such a movement, critics must be extremely self-conscious about the dangers of self-contradiction.

Indeed, Canadian literary critic, Linda Hutcheon, sees failure to be self-conscious as leading inevitably towards self-contradiction. She points out that

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[49] Eco, *Postscript*, p.63.

many Postmodern critics, starting with Lyotard, fall into the trap of creating 'masterful denials of mastery' and 'cohesive attacks on cohesion'.[50] Rushdie also self-consciously rejects the notion that literature is sacred, because 'nothing so inexact, so easily and frequently misconceived, deserves the protection of being declared sacrosanct. We shall just have to get along without the shield of sacralization, and a good thing, too. We must not become what we oppose' (*IH*, p.427). Rushdie understands that if the system is to change, then its opponents must not use its methods.

However, narratives about Postmodern literature are still produced. They are often not presented as authoritative metanarratives about literature, but as self-conscious fictions. Fiction is an ambiguous concept, closely associated with dishonesty and human imperfection as well as with the imagination. In the light of this, frequent declarations of its artificiality reduce the authoritative effect of any narrative, while continuing to allow it to be meaningful.

Despite the crisis of legitimation, narratives still play a very important role in Postmodern society. Lyotard's theories all centre on the changing status of narratives and metanarratives, and many critics, such as Brian McHale, agree that the continuing decline of the metanarratives has been greeted with a resurgence of narratives. McHale suggests that 'where once we had theories about narrative, we begin now to have stories about theory'.[51]

Peter Brooks points out that the power of narratives lie in their ability to allow people to represent and imagine their own identities for themselves. Because 'we live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past

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[50] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.20.
[51] Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.4.

actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed'.[52] Postmodern literature takes part in society's narratives about itself, and Postmodern critics follow the course of Postmodern literature and the Postmodern debate by constructing narratives about literature.

McHale believes that narrative is useful to Postmodern theorists 'as a means of building foundations by constructing constructions because storytelling (at least in its traditional forms) bears within it its own (provisional) self-grounding, its own (local, limited) self-legitimation'.[53] Rather than relying on some external legitimation, McHale suggests that Postmodern theories can make use of the inherent, but limited authority of the narrative form.

However, Postmodern stories do not enter a free, fair and equal arena of discourse; they compete with each other to make their points. The Postmodern condition is deeply involved with conflict not complacency, and the issues of use, value and legitimacy cannot be circumvented by describing a philosophy as a story. In 'Telling Postmodernist Stories', McHale stresses the importance of continuing to analyse, not just accept, descriptions. Because 'if all our stories about postmodernism, big or little, are strategic fictions, if all our categories are constructions, this does not mean that they are all equally *good* stories, equally *sound* constructions'.[54]

McHale feels that the only critical criterion available for Postmodern critics to distinguish between the worth of theories and literature is not 'objective *truth*' (p.552), but 'various kinds of *rightness* or *fit*' (p.553). He describes a number of

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[52] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.3.
[53] McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, p.5.
[54] Brian McHale, 'Telling Postmodernist Stories', *Poetics Today*, 9:3 (1988), 545-71 (p.552).

subjective points that could establish the fitness of a work, including 'superior *interest*'.[55] John Barth agrees with McHale's overall argument about judging the value of narratives about literature, asserting that 'critical categories are as more or less fishy as they are less or more useful'.[56] However, the subjectivity of such a mode of selection is clearly apparent. Who judges what is right, fit, and interesting, on what grounds and why should we agree with them?

McHale admits that his theory rests on outside legitimations. He is forced to conclude that the only position which is not based on some external metanarrative of aesthetic judgement or critical legitimation is 'productivity, a story's capacity to generate *other* stories, to stimulate lively conversation, to keep the discursive ball rolling'.[57] But ten years earlier, Nelson Goodman was more blunt: 'put crassly, what is called for in such cases is less like arguing than selling'.[58] Critical productivity, like philosophical productivity, is uncomfortably close to capitalist performativity, as Goodman, Eagleton, Jameson, and even Lyotard have noticed.

Without metanarratives in support of critical activity, that activity is at the mercy of becoming an end in itself, a self-legitimating activity that justifies itself by its own existence, but is otherwise meaningless. What is more, all the critical stories which have no greater ambition than to generate more stories will end up retelling the same story about criticism and narrative, without reference to even the Postmodern literature which they are supposedly conversing with.

Lyotard self-consciously uses narrative as a political statement, acknowledging its inherent authority, and therefore its contradictions. But McHale's attempt to

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[55] McHale, 'Telling Postmodernist Stories', p.553.
[56] John Barths, 'The Literature of Replenishment', *Atlantic*, 245:1 (January 1980), 65-71 (p.69).
[57] McHale, 'Telling Postmodernist Stories', p.553.
[58] Nelson Goodman, 'On Rightness of Rendering', *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), pp.109-40 (p.129).

remove the unacceptable and troublesome metanarrative elements from his narratives about Postmodernism is both impossible and discredits his theories. The complexities of Postmodernism cannot be contained within the limits of McHale's theory, and this throws the scope of literary criticism into question.

Connor suggests that 'Hassan may be right to identify postmodern theory as unsettling the cosily cognitive procedures of cultural analysis, and thereby jolting it into a renewed awareness of questions of power, belief, and value'.[59] No critical strategy has yet emerged which can tackle the Postmodern condition without defeating itself in the process. But all Postmodern theories capture something of the Postmodern condition when they address the problem and fail.

THE DEBATE ABOUT 'POSTMODERNISM'

While waiting for Lyotard's parology to produce a new paradigm of thought which will transform the debate, for better or worse, critics continue to wrestle with the intractable issue of Postmodernism. The trend towards creating self-conscious narratives to deal with Postmodernism and Postmodern literature seems the least hypocritical or complacent path for writers and critics, and the one which seems most in keeping with the spirit of the Postmodern condition.

The story-telling 'drive of narrative is difficult to avoid in literature, and provides a powerful and appropriately paradoxical method of addressing the current debates. Since the Postmodern condition highlights the competing fictionality of all metanarratives, a critical and literary enquiry which negotiates and demonstrates the authority, value and construction of narratives seems called for.

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[59] Steven Connor, 'Review', *Modern Language Review*, 85:4 (October 1990), 904-06 (p.906).

Some critics have attempted to re-write contemporary literature's 'Postmodern' label, hoping that renaming the problem would make it clearer or more open to solution. Jerome Klinkowitz has suggested 'Post-contemporary'[60] and Linda Hutcheon has suggested 'Metafiction'.[61] However, in the Postmodern debate the weight of interest in a large range of art-forms and the continuing popularity of this strangely unpopular term has forced analysts to face the problems of Postmodernism.

Hutcheon subsequently admits that 'although I would still stand behind my objections to the label [Postmodernism], it seems to have stuck, and it would be foolish to deny that metafiction is today recognized as a manifestation of postmodernism' (pp.xii-xiii). Using the same term has the advantage of allowing participants in the different debates about Postmodern society and culture to turn their attentions away from the title of their debate to other, more stimulating, areas. These include whether Postmodernism contains the capacity for dissent, or if it merely gives this impression while actually, consciously or unconsciously, reinforcing the current establishment.

Fredric Jameson offers the position that since

> the concept [of Postmodernism] is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory. I will argue that, for good or ill, we cannot *not* use it. But my argument should also be taken to imply that every time it is used, we are under the obligation to rehearse those inner contradictions and to stage those representational inconsistencies and dilemmas. [...] Postmodernism is not something that we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience.[62]

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[60] Jerome Klinkowitz, 'Preface', *Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-Contemporary American Fiction* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp.ix-x (p.ix).
[61] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen, 1984 (1980)), p.1.
[62] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.xxii.

The label Postmodern has become 'a shibboleth for tendencies',[63] a '*bon à tout faire*',[64] and most often a term of abuse. It is certainly a 'questionable label'[65] and no one agrees about any aspect of it except that it expresses some element of uncertainty. Despite this confusion the academic community is 'saddled with the term, whether we like it or not',[66] with all its many difficulties. No other term can encompass the extent, complexity and contradictions of the Postmodern condition.

Bearing this situation in mind, this thesis offers its own self-conscious fiction about Postmodern literature. This has been constructed from an exploration of a selection of Postmodern novels in relation to theories about Postmodernism in literature, theories about the Postmodern condition of society today. It is also informed by analyses of Postmodernism in different art movements.

The narrative of Postmodern literature presented here attempts to endow the controversial category with some useful significance, while trying to avoid reducing the entire movement to any over-simplified general unity. Rather than defining an exclusive or inclusive category, an open framework is proposed. This offers a reading of Postmodern literature as a broad and diverse movement, which is linked rather than unified by its relationships with Postmodern society, and with Modernism and other literary movements.

As the discussion above suggests, Postmodern literature is not a formal movement, but appears to be an artistic and critical exploration of the specific pressures of the late twentieth-century. It engages in dialogues with late twentieth-century Postmodern society and attempts to negotiate the current legitimation

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[63] Ihab Hassan, 'Introduction', *The Postmodernism Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, (Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 1987), pp.xi-xvii (p.xi).
[64] Eco, *Postscript*, p.65.
[65] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p.313.
[66] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), p.9. References hereafter to *PF* in the text.

crisis. This crisis has destabilised identities and every past grand narrative that justified society as a whole and justified each aspect of life, including the arts.

Harvey claims that Postmodern literature's 'cultural forms are firmly rooted in the daily circulation process of capital'.[67] But he bases this argument on a gross over-simplification of the relationship between the expression of economic system in superstructural institutions and the economic system. Postmodern literature and Postmodern society are far from identical or unified and are frequently in conflict. However, Postmodern literature is an attempt to debate with society from within that society, when the very concepts of debate, opposition and reason are highly problematic.

Postmodern literature also engages with more than just contemporary economic, political, philosophical and social matters. It is concerned with the artistic issues raised by literary Modernism and the apparent necessity to replace that Modernism as an alternative cultural dominant. Connor suggests that 'most accounts of literary postmodernism would want to insist on some form of critical engagement with modernism rather than a simple turning away from it'.[68]

The Postmodern framework of discussing and dealing with the Legitimation Crisis without the aid of guiding principles allows a considerable number of texts, strategies, techniques, ideas, issues and goals to be considered as Postmodern. Rather than attempting to create a complete survey of the extent of Postmodern literature, this thesis will examine the works of Alasdair Gray and Salman Rushdie in detail, to draw out some of the similarities and differences which lurk within Postmodernism. The following sections will consider the complexities of

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[67] Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, p.299.
[68] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.115.

Gray and Rushdie's work, and the contribution such Postmodern literature makes to the Postmodern debate, as it reassesses its shifting identity and changing place in society.

Debate is a flexible and neutral, but not passive, framework for Postmodernism, rather than an ideological programme. Instead of proposing a prescriptive theory, instructing authors about what they should be writing, and telling critics and readers how to read it, this thesis examines what texts are actually attempting, achieving, and how they are received.

Furthermore, the intention is to avoid attempting to list every possible stylistic and ideological feature related to Postmodern tendencies, and thus limit the reductive arguments about which contemporary, or even ancient, works are Postmodern. It seems more appropriate and interesting to recognise and reflect the philosophical and literary uncertainties which have generated the diversity of the Postmodern label, and then consider what the texts that I have selected are doing, and why.

UNCERTAINTY AND DEBATES

POSTMODERN UNCERTAINTY

The 'incredulity toward metanarratives' of the Postmodern condition not only questions the specific grand narratives of the Enlightenment, but also the possibility of accepting any metanarrative. Even language, once considered the neutral expression of already-formed thoughts, and the founding principle of any kind of logical and reasoned argument, is destabilised by twentieth-century linguistic, philosophical and aesthetic ideas, including those of Postmodern literature. Once the possibility of any justifying framework or agency is widely doubted, the consensus, which enables an idea to legitimate society, evaporates.

Postmodern literature both reflects this state of uncertainty, and engages with it. Attempts are made to negotiate how citizens of the late twentieth century can operate together in some sort of society without binding principles, and where uncertainty may even be appreciated at times as a better state than certainty. Lyotard equates reason and certainty with the death camps of the Holocaust (*PE*, pp.77-78). Salman Rushdie highlights the violence that can be generated by certainty and intolerance both in *The Satanic Verses* and when defending his novel against offended believers (*IH*, p.394).

The philosophical reluctance to accept any form of guarantees for certainty or truth has serious consequences for the novel form. Novels and other narrative literary forms, such as drama, have traditionally told stories with very certain structures. The epigram of 'The Detective and the Boundary',[1] by William

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[1] William Spanos, 'The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination', *Repetitions: The Postmodern Occasion in Literature and Culture* (London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), pp.13-49. Orig. pub. *Boundary 2*, 1 (Fall 1972), 147-68, and since revised.

Spanos, quotes Choubert, a character in Eugene Ionesco's play *Victims of Duty*, reflecting on what he deduces is the inevitable drive of narrative fiction:

> All the plays that have ever been written, from Ancient Greece to the present day, have never really been anything but thrillers. Drama's always been realistic and there's always been a detective about. Every play's an investigation brought to a successful conclusion. There's a riddle, and it's solved in the final scene. Sometimes earlier. You seek, and then you find. Might as well give the game away at the start.[2]

The power of the Beginning, the Middle and especially The End dominates fiction throughout its history, and was described in detail in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Spanos highlights Aristotle's description of the plot as the '*ultimate factor*' and 'the heart and soul [...] of the Tragedy'.[3] Spanos argues that the Aristotelian plot is 'a unified and whole action in which the end—in the sense not only of termination but [...] of goal or final cause (telos)—determines the process'.[4] The desire to reach a satisfying conclusion drives the whole narrative.

Peter Brooks describes narrative as:

> one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically [...] with the problem of temporality. [...] And plot is the principle ordering force of those meanings that we try to wrest from human temporality.[5]

According to Brooks, narrative 'demarcates, encloses, establishes limits, orders' (p.4). Narrative is a very powerful and basic way of interpreting the world and 'understanding how human life acquires meaning' (p.xii). The power of narrative is evident when children learn to organise coherent stories at about the age of three. They 'quickly become virtual Aristotelians, insisting upon any storyteller's

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[2] Eugène Ionesco, 'Victims of Duty: A Pseudo-Drama', *Plays*, trans. by Donald Watson, 9 vols (London: Calder, 1958), II, pp.267-316 (p.269). Orig. perf. (Paris: 1953).
[3] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by D.S Margolionth (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), p.158 and p.160. Orig. (Greece c. 322 BC).
[4] Spanos, *Repetitions*, ft.p.14.
[5] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p.xi.

observation of the "rules," upon proper beginnings, middles and particularly ends'.[6]

Our common sense of plot 'derives from many sources' but 'most of all, perhaps, it has been mo[u]lded by the great nineteenth-century narrative tradition' (p.xi). Brooks argues that there was an enormously increased interest in the plot during the nineteenth century. This:

> may suggest an anxiety at the loss of providential plots: the plotting of the individual or social or institutional life story takes on new urgency when one no longer can look to a sacred masterplot that organizes and explains the world. The emergence of narrative plot as a dominant mode of ordering and explanation may belong to the large process of secularization, dating from the Renaissance and gathering force during the Enlightenment, which marks a falling-away from those revealed plots [...] that appeared to subsume transitory human time to the timeless. (p.6)

With the waning of religious thought, humanity turned to narrative plotting to provide some form of meaning and a sense of the passing of time in an enormously complicated and uncertain world.

However, 'in our own century, we have become more suspicious of plots, more acutely aware of their artifice, their arbitrary relation to time and chance' (p.xii). Literature, such as Modernist texts, the plays of Samuel Beckett and many Postmodernist novels, challenge the conventions of the linear plot, especially its conclusion. Brooks argues that:

> Our most sophisticated literature understands endings to be artificial, arbitrary, minor rather than major chords, casual and textual rather than cosmic and definitive. [...] We have, in a sense, become too sophisticated as readers of the plot quite to believe its orderings. (p.314)

Brooks blames the cinema for making the plot so familiar that we can now only hold it in contempt. Film is 'a form that is consubstantial with temporal

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[6] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 3.

successiveness and has made the syntax of plot so available it seems to offer no further challenges'.[7]

From the earliest beginnings of the novel in *Don Quixote*[8] it has incorporated 'the antinovel—its critical reflection',[9] questioning its own conventions. But Brooks believes that the difference between Postmodern metafiction and earlier self-reflexive works 'is one of degree' (p.317). He suggests that there is now 'a greater explicitness in the abandonment of mimetic claims, a more overt staging of narrative's arbitrariness and lack of authority, a more open playfulness about fictionality' (p.317).

The argument that Postmodernism only differs in degree from earlier fiction seems based on purely formal textual analysis. However, Postmodernism is not a formal movement, but shares a common attitude towards exploring and negotiating the cultural and social pressures of the late twentieth century. It is in this underlying attitude that Postmodernism differs from its predecessors, while inheriting many of their techniques and ideas.

In an attempt to theorise the difference, Spanos suggests a much more sinister agenda behind the well-made plot, and a much more coherent philosophical programme for Postmodernist literature. Following the 'existential/ phenomenological' traditions of Soren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger, Spanos criticises the desire of plot-oriented literature to order and resolve reality

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[7] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p.314.
[8] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Life and Achievements of the Renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. by J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1950, (1616)). Orig. pub. (Spain: 1605 and 1613).
[9] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p.317.

as a failure to recognise '*Dasein's* (human being's) primordial not-at-homeness in the world'.[10]

Spanos considers the rational, Western, Enlightenment consciousness as viewing 'spatial and temporal phenomena in the world as "problems" to be "solved"'.[11] Authors express this rational consciousness in a 'self-deceptively willful effort to find objects for dread in order to domesticate [...] the threatening realm of Nothingness' (p.17). Spanos considers these attempts to tame experience to be both pointless and inherently violent and repressive.

Enlightenment reason is 'able to *man*ipulate, to lay hands on, the "irrational" world (including men and women, of course)' (p.17) by claiming that it is part of the process of helping humanity to progress and prosper. Enlightenment reason:

> can also *justify* the absurdity, the de-centeredness, of human existence: it allows man [...] to perceive the immediate, uncertain, problematic, and thus dreadful psychic or historical present of *Dasein* as a necessary part of a teleological linear design, as a causal link between the past and the future determined from a rational end, a transcendent logos. (p.17)

Every uncomfortable aspect of experience can be explained away by describing it as just a small part of a great, divine design, balanced by some other yet unknown detail. Rather than being frightening and unsettling, experiences become 'part of a comforting, even exciting and suspenseful well-made cosmic drama or novel, more particularly a detective story' (p.18).

According to Spanos, to persuade citizens of Enlightenment societies that such a well-made design existed the establishment needed objective observers, such as writers, scientists and detectives. They were to fill in the gaps and explain how

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[10] Spanos, *Repetitions,* p.16. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp.229-35. Orig. pub. *Jahrbuch für Phänomenologie und Phänomonologische Forschung*, 1927, Germany.
[11] Spanos, *Repetitions,* p.17.

everything worked towards one end in the coherent rational universe. Even when scientists, such as Einstein and Freud, began to move towards more complicated models of the universe, the collective consciousness of society still imagined the world to be 'a well-made cosmic drama'. [12]

Spanos argues that:

> refusing to resolve discords [...] into the satisfying concordances of an inclusive *télos* (or Identity), constitutes an assault against an *art*-ificialized nature in behalf of the recovery of its primordial terrors—and possibilities. [...] For only from the precincts of our last evasions, where 'dread strikes us dumb,'[13] only in this de-centered silent realm of dreadful uncertainty, this 'zero zone,' are we likely to discover the ontological, aesthetic, and sociopolticial possibilities of generosity.[14]

Spanos believes that only after humanity stops trying to impose any order on the universe will it be able to see the full potential of experience and find true progress and civilisation. His thesis rests on the belief that raw uncertainty is the healthiest state for humanity. However, uncertainty is not a totally positive idea, and can lead to intolerance, violent anarchy and fearful repression. Many of the greatest crimes against humanity, such as the Holocaust, developed out of profound uncertainty of identity, irrationality and fear of the future, other cultures and people.

Spanos sees the deliberate, philosophical rejection of the Aristotelian structure as the defining moment of twentieth century art. He claims that both Modernism and Postmodernism participate in this rejection, not just because this structure is too restrictive but also on the grounds that its programme of restructuring reality

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[12] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.18.
[13] Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?', trans. by R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick, *Existence and Being*, intro. by Werner Brock (London: Vision Press, 1949), pp.355-92 (p.367). Orig. Chair of Philosophy Inaugural Lecture, Freiberg University, 1929.
[14] Spanos, *Repetitions*, pp.48-49.

is hopelessly flawed, aesthetically and philosophically. Both movements self-consciously reject this structure in their contents and forms.

Spanos distinguished between these anti-Aristotelian movements by suggesting Modernism was motivated by 'an aesthetic reaction against the humanistic principle of utility'.[15] Modernism was an artistic opposition to those increasingly alienating Enlightenment policies which were designed to benefit the whole of society but which were increasingly seen as fostering restrictive, mechanical and dehumanising processes. Art, especially experimental and discordant art, irrationality and emotions had no place in such a regimented and materialistic vision, and the Modernists celebrated the existence of such subversive elements.

Postmodernist fiction, according to Spanos, rejects the traditional structure 'not so much in an aesthetic as in an existential critique of metaphysics, of the traditional logocentric Western view of man-in-the-world' (p.15). Postmodern fiction is not primarily a protest at the consequential brutality of Enlightenment thought focusing on the impact of such ideas on art. It is rather a firm rejection of the whole Enlightenment throughout society as well as in art. However, Spanos's vision of Postmodern literature as expressing such a unified and firm philosophical position is too general a statement.

Postmodern philosophical positions are much more vague than critical discourses are suited to expressing. The underlying unifying attitudes that allow critics to posit a Postmodern literary movement do not seem as ideologically specific as Spanos believes. While Postmodernism is both self-consciously uncertain and suspicious of all metanarratives this does not necessarily mean that all Postmodern literature is pursuing the same goal in the same manner.

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[15] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.14.

Uncertainty is ideologically neutral, and while many Postmodern objects may be read as expressing similar views, other equally Postmodern texts may express very different visions. The very uncertainty that underlies the Postmodern condition also prevents the whole-hearted opposition to the Enlightenment that Spanos advocates, or the formation of any other justifiable philosophical position.

So although Postmodern literature is not a formal movement, rigorous attempts, such as Spanos's, to explain the Postmodern tendencies in fiction as the result of a unified artistic movement, working to a coherent, politically motivated agenda, are fundamentally flawed. The self-conscious aesthetic and philosophical uncertainty with which Postmodern literature operates does produce a literary climate that is hostile to the perceived certainty of the linear Aristotelian narrative. Anti-Aristotelianism is expressed in many ways, but the self-consciousness of Postmodern fiction also forces it to turn away from any other form of certainty.

Consequently, Postmodern novels fight the principle of the finished and unified goal with many strategies, especially emphasising unresolvable and positive plurality rather than aiming for a single end and truth, and creating structures that are more open. Open-ended debates, interest in process and heterogeneity become common features of Postmodern literature by default and common usage rather than through the deliberate design of a co-ordinated aesthetic or philosophical movement.

POOR THINGS

Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things*[16] deliberately sets out to subvert the traditional Aristotelian end-oriented plot. It suggests that the truth of the story will be discovered, then frustrates that quest through paradoxes and unresolved uncertainty. *Poor Things* does not consist of a straightforward narrative told from one point of view, nor even of one story woven from different narrators' perspectives giving the readers the whole picture. The novel is a collection of competing, arguing and violently incompatible texts.

The Introduction (*PT*, pp.vii-xiv) is written by a fictional 'Alasdair Gray'. He describes the accidental discovery by another fictionalised person, Michael Donnelly, the historian and former assistant-curator of the Peoples' Palace Museum in Glasgow, of a book and a letter. The book, entitled 'Episodes From the Early Life of a Scottish Public Health Officer' (pp.9-244), was written by Archie McCandless and the accompanying letter, which contradicts Archie's book (pp. 251-76), was written by Archie's wife, Victoria.

'Gray' explains that he and 'Donnelly' have fallen out because 'Gray' believes the book is a 'complete tissue of facts' (p.xii) for which he has found some evidence. He therefore dismisses Victoria's letter. 'Gray' thinks that the letter shows that she is 'a disturbed woman who wants to hide the truth about her start in life' (p.xi). But 'Donnelly' believes that Archie's book is 'a blackly humorous fiction into which some real experiences and historical facts have been cunningly woven' (p.xi) while Victoria's letter should act as an introduction to Archie's text.

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[16] Alasdair Gray, *Poor Things* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992). References hereafter to *PT* in the text.

'Gray' disagrees because Victoria's letter would 'prejudice readers' (*PT*, p.xi) against Archie's story.

'Gray' lists documents as 'proofs' (p.vii) of his argument, but 'Donnelly' still doubts Archie's account:

> Donnelly has told me he would find the above evidence more convincing if I had obtained official copies of the marriage and death certificates and photocopies of the newspaper reports, but if my readers trust me I do not care what an 'expert' thinks. (pp.xiii-xiv)

Although 'Gray' purports to be carrying out a rigorous historical examination of the facts, his methods are suspect. He ends up rejecting expertise and rational arguments and appealing to reader's 'trust' instead.

Gray is distinct from his fictional character 'Gray', whom he has drawn as a rather opinionated editor. Gray uses this introduction to establish that there is confusion about the relationship between fact and fiction within the context of the novel, and by extension in society. The grounds upon which one can distinguish what is literally true and persuade others are highly contested. The following sections expand upon this idea.

Archie's book makes up the bulk of *Poor Things*. It gives a fantastic account of the Frankenstein-like creation of Bella Baxter, from the dead body of a strange woman and the brain of her unborn child, by his friend Godwin Baxter. Archie then recounts Bella's incredible progress towards maturity and social awareness from her strange and unnatural beginnings combining childish innocence with adult sensuality.

Archie's narrative is a curious mixture of genres and sources. He inserts letters from Duncan Wedderburn and Bella to allow them to tell their stories of their elopement and travels from their own point of view. He illustrates his narrative

with facsimiles of pages of Bella's letter, portraits of the characters, supposedly by William Strang, and medical diagrams.

As 'Gray' comments, Archie's narrative combines these elements to 'show his subject from a different angle, and ends by revealing a whole society' (*PT*, p.xi). Every separate discourse within 'Episodes' reinforces the singular vision of that text and story. However, the different registers of literary language within those elements, such as the combination of fantasy and science, of polemic and sexual fantasy do set up tensions within the supposedly unified and linear narrative.

Victoria McCandless's letter names a long list of 'morbid Victorian fantasy' (p.272) that Archie has 'filched from' (p.273). These include Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the works of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Rider Haggard's *She*, Conan Doyle's *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, and Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*.[17] Victoria also adds that Archie has 'plagiarized work by two very dear friends' (*PT*, p.273): George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*[18] and the scientific romances of H.G. Wells.

Archie's plot is coherent, but at the same time, its literary presentation undermines that coherence. It is an uncomfortable fusion of many incomplete structures, rather than a unified narrative, mirroring the creation of Frankenstein's

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[17] See Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. by David Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, (1818)); Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Stories*, ed. by Jenni Calder (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1979, (1886)); Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. by Maud Ellmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, (1897)); H. Rider Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1982, (1887)); Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. by W.W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, (1927)); and Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, original engravings by John Tenniel (London: Dent, 1976, (1871)).

[18] See George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, ed. by Gerard Gould, essay by John Russell Brown (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1983, (1913)).

monster. This section of *Poor Things* uses the same structural conventions of Aristotelian linear progression and conclusion as nineteenth-century realist fiction. But the conventional structure contains a strange and incompatible mixture of gothic thriller, scientific fiction and social realism. This collage of unrealistic fantasy and ultra realistic science and politics creates a very jarring narrative, challenging all the suggested Victorian genres.

The first chapters, which detail Archie's discovery of the creation of Bella Baxter, introduce the gothic elements of *Frankenstein* and other 'morbid' fantasies. However, such nineteenth-century gothic fiction is generally moralistic and dwells on the terrible consequences of perverting God's creation. Scientists such as Dr Jekyll and Victor Frankenstein suffer fatal consequences for daring to tamper with the correct order of the world.

These stories are ultimately moral thrillers, as order is finally restored after the experiments go horribly wrong. The fearful people react with hostility to Frankenstein's monster, because he is unnatural, and this drives him away from wanting to be part of society. Mr Hyde's bestial behaviour is the sign that he is a social outsider. Gothic fiction expresses cruelty in the context of this moral view, as an understandable if unfortunate reaction to the unknown, acting as an unwitting catalyst to the plot. 'Episodes' does not follow this pattern.

Although Archie becomes hysterical when Godwin describes Bella's creation, everyone who meets Bella, including Archie, finds her charming and attractive. Bella is not normal but her unusual development is portrayed as a success not a disaster. Her bohemian frankness destroys her predatory lover, Duncan Wedderburn, and her unpleasant first husband, General Aubrey de la Pole Blessington (*PT*, pp.237-39). But the results of her actions are presented as

victories for honesty and naturalness over repression and perversion. Both Archie and Godwin view Bella as a force for good in their world, not evil. In 'Episodes', society does not defeat and reject Bella. She intends to change it for the better by enrolling in medical school and becoming a doctor for women.

'Episodes' takes the older gothic form and subverts it by making the monster the heroine, a feminist pioneer and a social reformer. She is, however, still monstrous in her ever-questioning natural innocence, unpredictability and zest for life. She strips away society's veneer of civilisation and deconstructs its rigid conventions, changing it from within. Bella is created out of the remnants of society, its victims, a collage of childish vulnerability and adult availability. She is a pastiche of a woman, created as a benign experiment in medicine and social development, who escapes her limited expectations and becomes someone new.

Then again, looking at Archie's 'plagiarised' sources we find significant changes. George Bernard Shaw's dramas were sophisticated examinations of issues such as imperialism, feminism and class, often using humour and usually creating ethical dilemmas which were not easily resolved. *Pygmalion* presents a privileged man using his knowledge of the link between speech and class to conduct a linguistic experiment on a poor girl for a wager. Professor Higgins transforms Eliza Doolittle into a person without a station in their rigid society, and she rebels from his domineering treatment. The play ends without actually solving the problem of Eliza's position, leaving her at the cross-roads between a number of uncertain options, but Professor Higgins does acknowledge that she has achieved her own independence.

Godwin's physical and social creation of Bella has echoes of Professor Higgins linguistic and social creation of Eliza Doolittle. However, despite his name,

Godwin generally does not position himself as an arrogant man playing God with other peoples' lives. When Archie is alarmed that Bella may have been made as a sexual plaything for Godwin, Godwin rebukes him: 'I am an ugly fellow but have you known me do an ugly thing?' (*PT*, p.38). Godwin's project is not portrayed as a negative vision of current social conditions, but as an experiment leading towards a new society.

'Episodes' uses this political drama as a foil to the gothic sensationalism that it initially introduces, to create a new synthesis, attempting to inject more fantasy and imaginative energy into social literature. The morality of Godwin's thoughtful social experiment also contrasts with the dubious morality of Higgin's carelessly conceived experiment. Bella is far more fitted to succeed in society than Eliza Doolittle is. If this were the only part of *Poor Things*, the conclusion would be grossly simplistic and shallow, exploring far less of the rigid and dehumanising class structure of Victorian society than *Pygmalion*. However, 'Episodes' is not the only part of the novel, and later sections contribute new contrasts and paradoxes to the story.

The scientific romances of H.G. Wells come closest to the overall effect of 'Episodes'. In novels such as *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds* and *The First Men in the Moon*,[19] Wells uses science fiction to create powerful social allegories without being rigidly realistic or prosaic. His fiction is both adventurous, as gothic romances tend to be, and yet socially aware. Wells's fiction expanded on the scientific

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[19] See H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, ed. by John Lawton, Centennial ed. (London: Dent, 1995, (1895)); *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, ed. by Brian Aldiss (London: Dent, 1993, (1896)); *The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance*, ed. by Macdonald Daly (London: Dent, 1995, (1897)); *The War of the Worlds*, intro. by Arthur C. Clarke (London: Dent, 1993, (1898)); and *The First Men in the Moon*, intro. by Arthur C. Clarke (London: Dent, 1993, (1901)).

advances of his day, imagining time machines, space ships and invisibility, to create fiction and fantastic circumstances.

Wells's work is generally serious and focuses on possible scientific ethical dilemmas, such as the increasing industrialisation of society, to examine their social implications. His narratives do not provoke gratuitously melodramatic responses to adventures, and although the novels do not always end comfortably, the consequences of these reckless experiments are usually resolved. 'Episodes' combines Wells's scientific fantasy with humour and parodies of sentimental genres. The effect does not mock social and scientific literature as such but signals that 'Episodes' interrogates the conventions of both.

While Archie's narrative parodies the genres on which it is supposedly based, subsequent sections of *Poor Things* deconstructs the unity of Bella Baxter's story. After Archie ends his book, Bella contradicts him in a letter to her descendants. Rather than filling in details of his story, increasing its depth and impact, Bella totally rewrites Archie's account, telling her life-story a second time. Bella calls herself Victoria and claims that she is 'not the naïve Lucrezia Borgia and La Belle Dame Sans Merci described in the text' (*PT*, p.251).

Victoria offers her own politicised version of her life, including her impoverished Manchester childhood, Swiss convent education and unhappy first marriage. 'Mother had taught me to be a working man's domestic slave; the nuns taught me to be a rich man's domestic toy' (pp.258-59). At first, she feels that these experiences 'belong to different worlds' (p.262). However, Godwin juxtaposes the experiences of rich girls and poor maidservants using a doll's house, allowing Victoria to see the connection: 'Both are used by other people. [...] They are allowed to decide nothing for themselves' (p.263).

Victoria's narrative not only attempts to encapsulate her own range of experiences within the grand narrative of Socialism and the class struggle, amalgamated with a narrative about the repression of women, but also the experiences of everybody in her society. Her materialist metanarratives condition her entire narrative. She condemns Archie's book as a waste of money since it cost 'enough to feed, clothe and educate twelve orphans for a year' (*PT*, p.251); she also objects to his adding 'morbid Victorian fantasy' to the events to create an 'infernal parody' (p.273) of her life. Her text creates a conflict between the form and content of different parts of the novel, repeating the earlier narrative, though in a very different manner, rather than progressing from it.

Victoria links the 'Victorianism' of Archie's 'sham-gothic' (p.275) book to the architecture of the Scott Monument and the Houses of Parliament:

> Their useless over-ornamentation was paid for out of the needlessly high profit: profits squeezed from the stunted lives of children, women and men working more than twelve hours a day, six days a week in NEEDLESSLY filthy factories. [...] To me this book stinks as the interior of a poor woman's crinoline must have stunk after a cheap weekend railway excursion to the Crystal Palace. I realize I am taking it too seriously, but I am thankful to have survived into the twentieth century. (p.275)

Victoria's materialism makes the superficial connection between imaginative fiction and decorative architecture, and their monetary costs.

Victoria's materialism, however, creates a contradiction. She criticises Archie's narrative because it is not a conventional nineteenth-century realist story and therefore she rejects the idea that it serves a social function. But she also denies that art has any value for society and so Archie's narrative is not worth criticising. Victoria is forced to admit that her concerns negate themselves.

The rational Victoria demands 'WHY DID ARCHIE WRITE IT?' (p.273). She needs to explain Archie's irrationalism, and decides that he must have been driven

by 'carefully hidden envy' of Godwin's 'famous father and tender, loving mother' and her 'wealthy father, [...] famous first husband' and 'superior social graces' (*PT*, p.273). She feels that the anonymous and impersonal 'envy the poor' feel is a positive engine for social change 'if it works towards reforming this unfairly ordered nation' (p.273). But she carefully distinguishes between this and the negative personal envy of her poor husband for the advantages of his friends. Her political philosophy would collapse if these envies were not separated, by weakening the theory that the poor necessarily work collectively and idealistically.

Victoria attempts to disprove Archie's story logically. She notes 'how cleverly his fiction outwitted the truth' (p.274) and then points out how one medical detail of the climactic meeting with her first husband differed from the facts. She does not give her own account of this meeting beyond this trivial detail. Victoria claims that she has 'no time to go through every page separating fact from fiction' (p.274) and relies instead upon the readers' 'common sense' (p.274) to denounce Archie's fantastic lies, thus leaving her criticism unfinished in many places. So although Victoria favours fact over fiction, she is strangely reluctant to challenge rigorously each 'lie' with her own 'fact'.

Victoria does offer a detailed version of Godwin's death, but this is seriously at odds with the documentary evidence that 'Gray' lists in the Introduction, supporting Archie timetable of events. According to Victoria, she assists Godwin to die on the day that she returns to Glasgow, and subsequently marries Archie. She does not mention when she has time to meet General Blessington, although she admits she met him. The Introduction lists the General's suicide on 27th December 1883; Archie and Victoria's marriage certificate, dated 10 January

1884, naming Godwin as a witness; and Godwin's death certificate, dated 16 April 1884, and his newspaper obituary. Again, Victoria's stated preference for facts is called into question, this time by the standard source of 'facts', contemporary documentary evidence and records.

Victoria's letter ends with a wildly optimistic claim that war with Germany will never happen because international Socialism will triumph over Imperial Nationalism. The letter is dated August 1914, just before the start of the First World War, when Imperial Nationalism wrought havoc in Europe for 4 years. Victoria's optimism is the greatest weakness in her ideas, since readers know, with hindsight, that subsequent events will ruthlessly contradict her hopes and ideas. In the one area that readers know, the facts contradict rational, Enlightened Victoria again.

The metanarratives that Victoria supports and her version of events are demonstrated to be partial and incomplete. Her letter is internally contradictory, and since it casts doubts on Archie's version of events, it problematises our acceptance of any statements as 'true'. But Victoria's autobiography must be considered at least as important as her husband's strange vision, since both affirm the importance of listening to a woman's point of view.

In 'Episodes' Gray has Archie play with the conventions of literary representation and different forms of Victorian fiction, to create an anachronistically Postmodern tale. In the following letter, Victoria attempts to produce documentary evidence of the facts, and write the Realist version of events. However her attempt is contradicted by factual evidence and rather than merely recounting an objectively verified version, her letter becomes a defiantly self-authenticating narrative. Both narratives contradict themselves internally, and

each other, while at the same time both demand to be taken seriously as powerful, personal testimonies.

The final section of *Poor Things* is 'Notes Critical and Historical' (*PT*, pp.279-317) by the fictional editor 'Alasdair Gray'. 'Gray' offers editorial notes on details of both Archie's and Victoria's texts, with the deliberate intention of adjudicating between them and proving Archie's version to be fact. The notes are drawn from many historical and contemporary fictional and factual sources. 'Gray' wants to enhance the earlier sections, but his notes can also be read as a third, separate and internally contradictory version of Bella's life, questioning the value and veracity of documented facts still further.

'Gray' uses the opportunity to highlight and comment upon social injustices from Victorian times to the present day. The very first note mentions the risks the poor ran from relying on banks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. 'Gray' continues that 'In twentieth-century Britain such injustices only happen with pension funds' (p.279). This is possibly a reference to a number of recent financial scandals culminating in Robert Maxwell's huge fraud which robbed the Mirror Group Pension Fund of millions of pounds in the early 1990s.

This section of the novel draws overt parallels between the events and attitudes of the Victorian past of the novel and the late twentieth-century readers' present. Rather than focusing on the distance between the past and the present, the novel indicates that the issues it has examined are still immediately relevant.

'Gray' also uses the notes to give further details of the lives of Godwin Baxter, Archie and Victoria McCandless, and other important characters. He offers a surprising interpretation of Mr Astley. After examining evidence that Mr Astley is not whom he says, 'Gray' deduces that instead of being the cynical British

Imperialist that he pretends, Astley is in fact being ironic and is actually a Tsarist agent. Since Mr Astley's 'bitter wisdom' (*PT*, pp.152-67) is part of the catalyst which helps Bella form her political opinions this changes the readers' understanding of the basis of her philosophy.

The background against which Bella chose Socialism is no longer certain and stable. Readers are forced to consider if this situation materially changes the validity of her choice of Socialism or any other philosophy. They are also asked to recognise that all ideological choices are formed with partial knowledge and unavoidable uncertainty, and that we 'read' situations and texts differently according to the extent of our knowledge or ignorance of various factors.

The notes are often a strange blend of the trivial, such as railway timetables (p.285); interesting historical details about Glasgow; and telling social comments, such as the philosophies of Florence Nightingale (pp.279-80) and the contemporary agenda of the Scottish Widows insurance company (pp.285-86). There seem to be no criteria for 'Gray's' selection of evidence, and the notes seem to be a collection of facts for fact's sake, giving the appearance of being a body of evidence, rather than actually forming one.

The notes ostensibly attempt to build up an incontrovertible case to back up Archie's story. However, most of the notes on Archie's book are irrelevant to the 'truth' of his narrative. Where 'Gray' finds that Archie has made what seem to be mistakes, he tries to excuse them. When the actual garden is too small to match Archie's description, 'Gray' claims that the coach-house was built later (p.280). When 'Gray' later finds that the coach-house appears on the original plans, he claims that many buildings are not completed quickly (p.285).

'Gray' spends more time unintentionally confirming Victoria's account. He agrees with her version of her childhood, a childhood that Bella could not remember. He also gives a lengthy account of her later life, which seems to be an extension of the Victoria of the letter rather than the Bella of Archie's book. The overall effect of 'Gray's' notes is to strengthen Victoria's account, rather than support Archie as 'Gray' hopes. 'Gray', along with Archie and Victoria, loses control of his own narrative.

Victoria becomes a doctor and a birth control pioneer after the style of Marie Stopes, but her medical and political career is destroyed. Her strange attempts at creating a sexual revolution and unrepressed, liberated society are attacked from all sides and casually dismissed. Despite her Socialism and Pacifism, Victoria's sons all die in the First World War. Her failure to persuade even her own children of her causes means that she has no posterity to read her letter. At the end of her life in 1946, she still hopes optimistically that a Socialist utopia is about to be created. We are left with an impression of a strong-willed but ultimately powerless woman, with a radical philosophy that goes unrealised.

'Gray' does not attempt to explain how the charming Bella transforms into the unsympathetic Victoria, who even complains about keeping her dying husband company when she 'could have done more good at other bed-sides' (*PT*, p.255). Is Victoria trying to hide her bizarre origins, as 'Gray' suggests, or has Archie distorted the truth of his wife's life? The narrative mocks any hope on the readers' part for certainty.

Bella and Victoria share a similar sexual freedom, some linguistic idiosyncrasies, such as calling sex 'wedding' (p.105, and p.309), and are both committed Socialists, but their characters and experiences differ crucially.

Victoria is the product of her Victorian upbringing, rejecting the role assigned to her by society, trying to write a new part for herself and others, in a Social Realist reflection of reality and keeping a nineteenth century view of progress and amelioration. Bella is a blank who learns about her world from a unique perspective like a fictional character at large in the real world.

Godwin describes Bella's development as an escape from the oppressive terror of growing up:

> Bella has all the resilience of infancy with all the stature and strength of fine womanhood. [...] [S]he has never been taught to feel her body is disgusting or to dread what she desires. Not having learnt cowardice when small and oppressed she only uses speech to say what she thinks and feels, not to disguise these, so she is incapable of every badness done through hypocrisy and lying—nearly every sort of badness. All she lacks is experience, especially the experience of decision making. (*PT*, p.69)

Victoria is an example of the growth of Socialism and Feminism out of the injustices of Victorian Britain, and the failure of these philosophies to neutralise the more selfish emotional appeals of sexism, wartime Nationalism and private enterprise. Bella represents the power of the unexploited and undamaged. Victoria's Socialism fails to defeat repression because it is the product of repression; Bella's socialism may well seem more potent because it is the product of an unrestrained development.

However, it is also possible to read Bella as the medical and literary creation of male self-indulgence and sexual fantasy, who conveniently remains sexually available even after she becomes ideologically and economically independent. Alternatively, if we disbelieve Victoria and postulate that Bella really transforms into Victoria, then Bella could be seen as a failed social experiment, withering in the face of establishment pressure.

Victoria could equally be seen as a heroic figure, struggling on despite overwhelming odds, presenting a picture of the general and personal challenges that lie ahead of all radical campaigners. Victoria's life demonstrates that change is possible and offers hope to future campaigners. This is reflected by the vast difference between the social conditions of Victorian Britain and the present day. Ultimately, it is impossible to extract a reading from *Poor Things* that combines all aspects of Bella and Victoria in a unified whole. They stand in sharp and uncomfortable contrast to each other, constantly shifting their meaning in relation with each other and other aspects of the novel.

As well as the foregrounded tensions within the structure of each section and between the sections, and the ongoing conflict over Bella/Victoria's identity and biography, *Poor Things* also discusses a number of ideological issues. The arguments about the merits of Socialism are obvious examples of these discussions, but other issues are also examined. These include other political creeds, aspects of feminism, atheism, medical and scientific ethics, and the irresponsible power and role of the Press.

Some ideas, such as the value of women and the ideologically motivated destructiveness of the press, are strongly supported by events in the novel. But most of these issues are presented from several perspectives and the text does not resolve them all. These discourses represent many different and incompatible pictures of the world. Open debates within the work complement and reflect the open structure of the novel. Both the structure and the content combine to create a vision of characters forced to try to make some overall sense of an increasingly uncertain and irredeemably complex world.

Poor Things does not present readers with a fragmented total picture, which can be pieced together like a puzzle and then reassembled in the right order at the end. The disparate sections of the novel react to each other and appear to tackle the same subjects, but since they all claim to occupy the same historical space yet cannot be resolved into a united whole, they remain separate strands.

Each piece fails to be as coherent as it claims, and that incoherence increases when they are juxtaposed. At the same time, none of the parts can be resolved by being dismissed and they all continue to demand to be taken seriously. Rather than producing a tale with a unified and linear structure, *Poor Things* has at least three different stories each of whom make literary, social and personal resolution and certainty less possible.

THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH

The Moor's Last Sigh[20] by Salman Rushdie also works to subvert the traditional end-oriented plot. However, on first examination the novel has a much more traditional structure. The short first chapter quickly introduces a man reviewing his life from its end:

> When you're running out of steam [...] it's time to make confession. [...]
>
> Now, therefore, it is meet to sing of endings; of what was, and may be no longer; of what was right in it, and wrong. A last sigh for a lost world, a tear for its passing. Also, however, a last hurrah, a final, scandalous skein of shaggy-dog yarns [...] and a set of rowdy tunes for the wake. A Moor's tale, complete with sound and fury. (*MLS*, p.4)

This section not only opens the novel but also points the readers firmly towards the end. The very first sentence begins 'I have lost count of the days that have

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[20] Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Cape, 1995). References hereafter to *MLS* in the text.

passed since I fled the horrors of Vasco Miranda's mad fortress in the Andalusian mountain-village of Benengeli' (*MLS*, p.3). However, although this sentence and chapter focuses upon the inevitable end, '*Here I stand. Couldn't've done it differently*' (p.3), the novel frustrates this Aristotelian, plot-oriented focus.

Within three pages of this 434-page novel, many of the most important events of the life of Moraes 'Moor' Zogoiby are revealed, setting up a skeletal structure for the novel. *The Moor's Last Sigh* has indeed given 'the game away at the start'.[21] This novel removes suspense by revealing the plot at the beginning while pretending to incite the curiosity of the readers as to the outcome of events.

While most of the novel seems to follow a traditional linear pattern, as the Moor, as a captive of Vasco Miranda, writes out the story of his family, the introductory chapter is actually written and read out of order. This chapter is written after the Moor has escaped from Miranda and has 'already nailed' (*MLS*, p.6) up the text of his story. Anyone who follows the Moor's story across the Spanish landscape in the order that he nailed it up will find this introduction at the end of their journey and of the story. This gives the story a doubly circular structure, starting at the end both metaphorically and literally, and endows the story with something of the air of inescapable fate.

The parallel tale of the Sultan Boabdil also gives the Moor's story a sense of an incontrovertible framework, as the Moor echoes Boabdil's exile, mercenary activities and failure. The initial brief revelations of the plot and the frame appear to remove all uncertainty from the story. However, the more the narrative progresses, the more uncertain and disintegrated the text and the Moor become, and the more literary and philosophical certainty is parodied. The novel starts

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[21] Ionesco, 'Victims of Duty', p.269.

from a position of absolute certainty through hindsight, and then deliberately deconstructs this certainty. Rather than divine revelations, the novel reveals a Postmodern universe where nothing is certain and no authority or knowledge can be blindly trusted.

The story charts the Moor's path through an increasingly plural and fragmented world. As in *Midnight's Children*,[22] Rushdie gives *The Moor's Last Sigh*:

> a plural form, since it seemed to me that I was writing about a world that was about as manifold as it's possible for a world to be. If you were to reflect that plurality, you would have to use as many different types of form as were available to you – fable, political novel, surrealism, kitchen sink, everything – and try to find an architecture which would allow all those different kinds of writing to co-exist.[23]

Rather than presenting several inconsistent, competing and incompatible worlds in separate texts, as *Poor Things* does, *The Moor's Last Sigh* present itself and many aspects of its world as a 'palimpsest' (*MLS*, p.184). Catherine Lockerbie describes a palimpsest as 'a surface concealing something else'.[24] The novel explores the idea of experiencing the world in layers, where many worlds compete within the same textual space, on different planes. While Gray and Rushdie use different models, or literary 'architecture', they both deal with multiple worlds, or multiple perspectives based on what we know or think we know.

Rushdie draws the idea of the palimpsest from his own personal anecdote of the lost portrait of his mother, painted over many years ago. He uses the concept

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[22] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1982, (1981)). References hereafter to *MC* in the text.
[23] Salman Rushdie, in 'Salman Rushdie', *Novelists in Interview*, ed. by John Haffenden (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.231-61 (p.248).
[24] Catherine Lockerbie, 'Rushdie Lifts the Veil', interview with Salman Rushdie, *Scotsman, Magazine*, Thursday 7 September 1995, p.14.

of obscuring layers as an image of humanity's incomplete understanding of the universe:

> there is this truth which is a valid truth which we find on the surface of our lives, but every so often either by design or accident [...] a bit of it gets scratched away and you see something quite other, and maybe darker, maybe happier [...] underneath.[25]

Layers are present in the novel overlying history; paintings; people and family life; Bombay and India; the extensive business dealings of Moor's father, Abraham Zogoiby; the feelings of characters; colonialism; and the novel itself. The Moor's story adds new layers to the tale of the Sultan Boabdil and contains veiled comments on the continuing controversy over the *Satanic Verses* and on Postmodern art and literature in general. *The Moor's Last Sigh* examines how characters discover by chance that their pictures of the world is not sufficient, and explores the resulting meetings of worlds.

Occasionally the separation between the worlds cracks and what was covered is revealed and interacts, often violently, with the surface of what until then, a character has taken as normality. The Moor discovers a dark underworld, the previously invisible world of the underclass of slum dwellers, criminals, corrupt politicians and businessmen and the possible sins of his own parents, and these discoveries irrevocably change his ideas about the world.

Hermione Lee considers that one aspect of *The Moor's Last Sigh* examines 'what is repressed in family life and how that will return'.[26] Many other examples of palimpsest repeat this return of the repressed. Rushdie describes the meeting of worlds 'as if there is this terrible rupture in the surface of the world and this other

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[25] Salman Rushdie, in Hermione Lee, interview with Salman Rushdie, *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4, Saturday 2 September 1995.
[26] Hermione Lee, interview with Salman Rushdie, *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4, Saturday 2 September 1995.

reality underneath which comes cracking through before the surface closes over again'.[27] No 'truth' is fully able to explain the world, or to prevent other experiences intruding.

By describing different layers as surface and depth, as under and over, the text initially invokes ideas of discovering the hidden 'truth' under false pictures. Rushdie uses an Indian theological idea as one of his sources for the palimpsest:

> there's an idea in Hindu mysticism of what's called Maya, which is the idea that one sees reality through a veil [...] of illusion and that because of the limitation of our own powers of perception what we end up seeing is the veil rather than the thing behind it.[28]

The Moor certainly considers that his previously normal reality is now not so much a valid truth as a comforting lie. In the light of his discoveries and experiences of the underworld, a hidden 'truth' has devalued and superseded the surface layer of his life. The Moor believes that layers obscure reality on many fronts:

> [Bombay] itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an invisible reality moved phantomwise beneath a visible fiction, subverting all its meanings, how then could [...] any of us have escaped that deadly layering? How, trapped as we were in the hundred per cent fakery of the real, in the fancy-dress, weeping Arab kitsch of the superficial, could we have penetrated to the full, sensual truth of the lost mother below? How could we have lived authentic lives? How could we have failed to be grotesque? (*MLS*, pp.184-85)

However, while the Moor feels that normality is a 'visible fiction' covering an 'invisible reality' the passage also implies that it is impossible to escape from the 'hundred per cent fakery of the real' (p.184). At this point, the Moor still believes that hidden truths are more valid and influential than surface lives.

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[27] Salman Rushdie, in Suzie Mackenzie, 'The Man Who Made the Booker', interview with Salman Rushdie, *Guardian, Weekend*, Saturday 4 November 1995, pp.12-18 (p.15).
[28] Rushdie, in Lee, *Kaleidoscope*, Radio 4.

The Moor even admits the theological extension of his theory of hidden truths. When he finds yet another layer of corruption in his father's business empire the Moor ponders whether the palimpsest hides further transcendent truths:

> beneath this glittering monetarist vision there lurked a hidden layer of activity: the inevitable secret world that has existed, awaiting revelation, beneath everything I have ever known. –And if the reality of our being is that so many covert truths exist behind Maya-veils of unknowing and illusion, then why not Heaven and Hell, too? Why not God and the Devil and the whole blest-damned thing? If so much revelation, why not Revelation? (*MLS*, pp.334-35)

The logical step from hidden meanings to the divine origin of all meanings has important implications for literature, especially uncertain Postmodern literature.

Roland Barthes suggests that twentieth-century literature and theory, including Postmodern novels, deliberately move away from the hierarchical structures of meaning implied by the Moor in his interpretation of the palimpsest:

> In precisely this way literature [...] by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law.[29]

The Moor's version of the palimpsest seems to contradict the Postmodern rejection of justifying and legitimating transcendental truths.

However, *The Moor's Last Sigh* uses the Moor's imagery to invoke ultimate truth in order to undermine and parody this concept. The Moor speculates about God; 'If so much revelation, why not Revelation?' But he instantly dismisses the notion, and turns away from the idea of fundamental meaning: '*Please*. This is no time to discuss theology. The subject on the table is terrorism' (*MLS*, p.335). The

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[29] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp.142-48 (p.147). Orig. pub. *Mantéla*, V (1968), France.

Moor finds the concept of God irrelevant and abstract, especially in the context of extreme political violence.

The novel focuses upon the idea of incomplete perception rather than upon transcendental truth, for while the Moor sees many worlds as layered hierarchically, with a surface of fiction, the worlds are presented as equally real in the text. *The Moor's Last Sigh* creates a Postmodern version of the palimpsest that presents worlds competing for prominence within the same country, city, family and person.

Suzie Mackenzie describes Rushdie commenting that the layers of reality are equally valid, yet incompatible:

> Neither [reality] is more real. 'Both are real. They are different realities that lie on top of each other and are not compatible with each other.' It is a strange thing to feel about life, [Rushdie] says, 'that it's full of incompatibilities. That realities which describe one world could not possibly contain the other.'[30]

The Moor views layers of reality as lying over or under each other, describing the palimpsest in a hierarchical fashion, implying the validity of the hidden truth over the surface normality. However, the novel itself does not maintain such a fixed relationship and undermines such certainty.

The novel examines the meeting of different layers, but emphasises the impossibility of distinguishing and reaching the ultimate truth. The Moor's privileged life is no more or less real than the life of a slum dweller or gang-member. But he perceives his experiences in the Underworld of Bombay Central lock-up as fantastic visions of Hell. Jailers metamorphose into 'hybrid monsters' with 'the heads of beasts and poisonous snakes for tongues' (*MLS*, p.286). The

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[30] Suzie Mackenzie and Rushdie, in Mackenzie, 'The Man Who Made the Booker', interview with Salman Rushdie, *Guardian, Weekend*, Saturday 4 November 1995, pp.12-18 (p.15).

Moor himself ceases to be the man he imagines and instead feels his personality ebb away with the loss of his skin and dignity. 'I was becoming nobody, nothing; or, rather, I was becoming what was made of me. I was what the Warder saw [...] I was scum' (*MLS*, p.288).

However, as the Moor spends more time in the underworld, it becomes more real to him. Eventually the Catholic-Jewish Moor abandons the logic of cause-and-effect for the non-privileging of reason in Hinduism, when he joins a violent Hindu militia. Finally, he discovers that he no longer feels lost in an alien universe:

> Something that had been captive all my life had been released [...] and whose release burst upon me like my own freedom. I knew in that instant that I need no longer live a provisional life, a life-in-waiting [...] but could enter, at long last, into myself – my true self, whose secret was contained in that deformed limb. [...] Now I would brandish it with pride. Henceforth I would be my fist; would be a Hammer, not a Moor. (pp.294-95)

The Moor finds that he too is a palimpsest. He is a passive man, living at the mercy of his speeded-up biology, without a role in his normal life, who discovers his active role in another world as a violent mercenary.

After years of exile the Moor returns to his previous world, but he is no longer the same person and cannot see his old world in the same way. He now hears Abraham's descriptions of complicated secret and illegal business deals in a different form, as 'serpentine tales. And they were like fairy tales, in a way: goblin-sagas of the present day, tales of the utterly abnormal recounted in a matter-of-fact, banal, duty manager's normalising tones' (p.333). Although Abraham's life involves both visible and invisible elements, it is impossible for the Moor to envisage Abraham's complete personality on one layer of existence.

The Moor sees his father's criminal activities as the dark truth undermining the previous truth of their family life.

However, the Moor cannot accept those criminal activities as 'normal', even if they are 'true', and can only imagine them as myths and fairy-stories. Abraham is entirely the evil, terrifying, criminal mastermind who sells atomic bombs to terrorists and may have murdered his own wife and daughter. He is also entirely the Moor's father, a respected businessman, the pathetic butt of Aurora's ironic wit and once a passionate lover. After Abraham is murdered for being a ruthless gang Godfather, the Moor feels that it is 'an eternity and a day ago' since 'a young duty manager and a fifteen-year-old girl had fallen in pepper love' (*MLS*, p.375). The two aspects of Abraham's character occupy worlds that do not meet for the Moor, and each of which seems unreal to the other.

Camoens, Abraham's father-in-law, echoes his complicated straddling of different worlds. Camoens is a millionaire Marxist, and an Indian nationalist who loves English literature. The Moor sees Camoens's contradiction as a positive quality:

> his willingness to permit the coexistence within himself of conflicting impulses is the source of his full, gentle humaneness [...] that hate-the-sin-and-love-the-sinner sweetness, that historical generosity of spirit, which is one of the true wonders of India. (pp.32-33)

Yet, Camoens's positive contradictions are almost swamped by the negative contradictions and murderous behaviour of his family.

Although the Moor has already described Camoens's belief that evil is 'inhuman' as 'an absurd notion' (p.33), the Moor cannot express the reasons for communal violence between neighbours and families except in terms of inhuman, demonic possession:

> there is a thing that bursts out of us at times, a thing that lives in us, eating our food, breathing our air, looking out through our eyes, and when it comes out to play nobody is immune; possessed, we turn murderously upon one another, thing-darkness in our eyes and real weapons in our hands. (*MLS*, p.36)

The darker side of human nature exists in another dimension within people's personalities. When cruelty erupts through the civilised surface it appears totally alien to the Moor, although he happily inhabits that supposedly alien world himself at times. He re-enters that other world to murder Raman Fielding. The Moor attempts to justify his revenge by invoking the common humanity of violence: 'civilisation is the sleight of hand that conceals our natures from ourselves [...] blood-lust was in my history, and it was in my bones' (p.365).

Different worlds, like Bakhtin's many voices, co-exist uncomfortably and come into sharp relief only when they intrude upon one another. The Moor describes the battle between the Hindu fundamentalism of Raman Fielding and the corrupt commercial empire of Abraham Zogoiby as 'the coming war of the worlds, Under versus Over, sacred versus profane, god versus mammon, past versus future, gutter versus sky: that struggle between two layers of power' (p.318). In this passage, God belongs with the gutter and Underworld, and the profane with the sky and Overworld.

However, Abraham's Overworld is composed of many secret elements, suggesting that he too occupies a form of Underworld. Fielding's Underworld also has a respectable Overworld face in local politics. Another Overworld combining honesty and piety is possible but not present here. The Under and Overworlds mentioned here are the Moor's own personal worlds: his own Underworld of independence and violence and his own Overworld of family respectability.

Fielding and Abraham do not represent ultimate, pure truths but specific 'layers of power' struggling for both the Moor and India's souls.

The connection between different worlds of reality and power is important because it reflects that those worlds are constructed out of human experiences and by human actions, rather than being transcendent and unchangeable. Recognising the existence of many competing worlds and experiences rather than only one is an important political act. It exposes those realities as being the seats of power in society, and asks questions about how that power is manipulated, and by whom. Postmodern literature is in a good position to ask these questions, because of its uncertain perspective and its attempts to separate and explore all of the different worlds we inhabit, without resolving their crucial tensions by a unifying vision.

Different kinds of worlds in *The Moor's Last Sigh* appear to rely upon general ignorance of their double character, leaving them undisturbed to exploit their underworlds while maintaining a respectable front. Fielding's rhetoric is based on a travesty of plural Hinduism, and Abraham's business only works when its corruption is ignored.

Fielding operates both a public political campaign to convert voters to his cause and a secret gang of enforcers who put down strikes and terrorise people into supporting him. Abraham bases his success on the 'principles of invisibility, those hidden laws of nature that could not be overturned by the visible laws of men' (*MLS*, pp.185-86). He trades on the fear and greed of officials, businessmen and criminals and the ignorance of the public and honest authorities.

However, when corruption is revealed and rejected and it ceases to be a successful strategy and destroys those who practise it. Abraham portrays himself as a failed conjuror whose sleight of hand has been noticed: 'the magic stops

working when people start seeing the strings' (*MLS*, p.187). The powers of these two worlds rely upon there being different and separate respectable and disreputable layers of reality for them to operate in. The novel demonstrates that these layers exist and contradict each other, none holding the whole truth, despite their claims.

The Moor's Last Sigh not only deconstructs the negative aspects of the palimpsests of existence, but also celebrates the plurality of layered realities. The novel itself uses many layers of meaning to create itself. The legends of the Sultan Boabdil and Moorish Spain, known as the Convivencia, are examples of a positive pluralist society, albeit maintained as a colonial state. The novel relates this to the secularist myth upon which India founded its independence, and which is presented as increasingly under threat. Rushdie uses the ending of the Moorish kingdom by the forces of Catholic Spain as a metaphor for the destruction of secularism and tolerance in India by extremists.

The novel adds a further fictional layer of plurality to the legend of Boabdil when Abraham's Jewish family claims to be descended from an illicit liaison between the Muslim Boabdil and a Jewish girl (pp.82-83). Moraes's nickname 'Moor' comes from the family's claims of descent from Boabdil, and his own mixed lineage evokes Moorish Spain and secularist India.

Rushdie explains that his interest in plurality is more than an abstract issue:

> At a moment at which the authenticity of the Indian experience of Indian minorities is being seriously questioned by the Hindu nationalist movement it seemed to me important to take the most minor minority, [...] a mixture between two very small communities, the Christian community and the Jewish community, and to say, nevertheless, this is as truthful and central an Indian experience as anything else.[31]

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[31] Rushdie, in Lee, *Kaleidoscope*, Radio 4.

In a climate of political, religious and ethnic intolerance in India *The Moor's Last Sigh* deliberately presents the lives of the Moor's family as inescapably Indian. It suggests that it is the blending of cultures that has given India its authentic flavour, not the often-violent purity of any one tradition.

Even the Hindu nationalist, Raman Fielding, who is directly opposed to secularism, is a complex man. He has 'many non-Hindu tastes' (*MLS*, p.297) such as eating meat, and pretends to be a philistine while enjoying high art while also proudly resisting any moral improvement (p.298). Fielding claims that India is not mongrel but only consists of that Hindu culture 'before the invasions' and that this 'true nation is what we must reclaim from beneath the layers of alien empires' (p.299). However, when his acolytes mock the Indian Muslim culture 'that lay palimpsest-fashion over the face of mother India' Fielding objected. He 'thundered at them [...], would sing ghazals and recite Urdu poetry [...] from memory and speak of the glories of Fatehpur Sikri and the moonlit splendour of the Taj' (p.299).

The novel suggests that the blending of peoples and cultures is more than secularism, which is a deliberate political policy, being an inescapable element of the Indian experience. The British colonial rulers and settlers attempted to impose their authority and visions on the people and their country, but with only limited success. As the colonial period drew to an end the English vicar, the Rev. Oliver D'Aeth saw that:

> India was uncertainty. It was deception and illusion. Here at Fort Cochin the English had striven mightily to construct a mirage of Englishness [...] But D'Aeth could not help seeing through the conjuring trick [...] seeing [...] the parrots flying over the rather un-Home-Counties jacaranda trees. And when he looked out to sea the illusion of England vanished entirely; for the harbour could not be disguised, [...]' as if England were being washed by an alien sea. Alien, and encroaching; [...] the frontier between the English enclaves

> and the surrounding foreignness had become permeable, was beginning to dissolve. India would reclaim it all. (*MLS*, p.95)

The novel is not falling into the trap of narrow nationalism here by invoking the purity of the Indian experience over the British version, but using the colonial period as an example of the irresistible strength of heterogeneity over singularity. The inherent multiplicity of India and its tropical expansiveness defeats the rigid and repressive imagination of the British colonialists. This is an example of the inability of any one vision to contain all the natural or cultural experiences of India and the world.

Aurora also uses India as a metaphor for multiplicity. She combines her image of India with the equally pluralistic image of Boabdil, the Moor, and the stories of the Alhambra palace in Granada (pp.79-80) as a metaphor for the blending of cultures and peoples. 'Around and about the figure of the Moor in his hybrid fortress she wove her vision, which in fact was a vision of *weaving*, or more accurately interweaving' (p.227). Aurora uses her son, the latter day Moor, the result of a Jewish and Catholic alliance, as her model for Boabdil.

The Moor describes Aurora combining these symbolic elements in her paintings with fantastic imagery, technical plurality and evocative uncertainty:

> The Alhambra quickly became a not-quite-Alhambra. [...] The water's edge, the dividing line between two worlds, became in many of these pictures the main focus of her concern. She filled the sea with fish, drowned ships, mermaids, treasure, kings; and on the land, a cavalcade of local riff-raff [...] and other figures from history or fantasy or current affairs or nowhere. [...] At the water's edge strange composite creatures slithered to and fro across the frontier of the elements. Often she painted the water-line in such a way as to suggest that you were looking at an unfinished painting which had been abandoned, half-covering another. But was it a waterworld being painted over the world of air, or vice versa? Impossible to be sure. (p.226)

This passage not only describes Aurora's paintings, but also the novel itself, which equally focuses upon the 'the dividing line between two worlds' and is filled with juxtapositions of the fantastic and the familiar, and the legends of Boabdil. As in the paintings, the novel layers its palimpsests with uncertain and unresolved hierarchies.

Aurora describes her paintings as a:

> Place where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away. Place where an air-man can drowno in water, or else grow gills; where a water-creature can get drunk, but also chokeofy, on air. One universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumpo'ing into another, or being under, or on top of. Call it Palimpstine. (*MLS*, p.226)

Aurora also invokes the image of layers of reality. But unlike the Moor, who tends to see the existence of different worlds as a threat, Aurora acknowledges the possibilities generated when worlds meet, and even the necessity of adapting to survive in a place without a stable universe.

Figures in Aurora's paintings must either learn to breathe alien atmospheres or die, as characters in the novel must also learn to live other lives. However, Aurora's worlds are different natural orders; adapting to breathe water is morally and ideologically neutral. The different worlds of *The Moor's Last Sigh* are human constructs, and their collisions violate important ideological, social and cultural boundaries of everyday existence.

Aurora creates a positive vision of plurality in her works. The Moor describes her paintings as political as well as artistic experiments:

> In a way these were polemical pictures [...] an attempt to create a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation; she was using Arab Spain to re-imagine India, and this land-sea-scape in which the land could be fluid and the sea stone-dry was her metaphor – idealised? sentimental? probably – of the present, and the future, that she hoped would evolve. So, yes, there was a didacticism here, but what with the vivid surrealism of her images and the kingfisher brilliance of her colouring

> and the dynamic acceleration of her brush, it was easy not to feel preached at, to revel in the carnival without listening to the barker, to dance to the music without caring for the message in the song. (*MLS*, p.227)

The Moor's frequent descriptions of Aurora's paintings create areas within the novel of artistic, optimistic celebration of plurality as an uplifting and positive cultural and philosophical force that is then questioned by the events and characters of the text. The Postmodern concern for plurality is itself presented here as a specific romantic political and artistic ideological position, and deconstructed, especially through the presentation of the Moor.

The Moor is like one of the 'strange composite creatures' (p.226) of Aurora's Palimpstine. He always appears to be a creature out of his element, since his fantastic natures are not compatible with each other or any specific world. The Moor is literally living his life at twice normal speed, being fully grown at 10 and dying of old age at 35. He also has a deformed right hand 'like a club' (p.146), which can do nothing but deliver tremendous punches. The Moor describes his ageing in both fantastic and biological terms, first comparing himself to 'a visitor from another dimension, another time-line' (p.144). But then dismissing this idea: 'No need for supernatural explanations; some cock-up in the DNA will do' (p.145).

Whenever the Moor is confronted with a fantastic claim, such as his own existence or the truth of his family's descent from Vasco da Gama (p.84) and the Sultan Boabdil (pp.79-83), he offers a supposedly more believable alternative. He claims to suffer from a medical condition that is totally unknown to science. He puts his family history down to the 'self-mythologising' (p.85) of his romantic relatives who coincidentally share surnames with famous people. He also explains his granny's possession of an emerald crown not as an heirloom but because she

was a member of a smuggling gang. On closer examination, these alternative explanations are as fantastic as the fantasies they contend with, partly because the situations they try to explain are fantastic in themselves.

Despite his attempts to offer supposedly less outlandish explanations, the Moor makes a 'confession' to his readers. He finds that 'if I were forced to choose between logic and childhood memory, between head and heart, then sure; in spite of all the foregoing, I'd go along with the tale' (*MLS*, pp.85-86). However, he also admits that 'finally it is not for me to judge, but for you' (p.85). Although the Moor declares his allegiance to the fantastic, he continues to question unrealistic ideas and to put the case for more logical ones. In this way, the novel offers the reader the freedom to explore the possibilities of imaginative alternatives, represented here by fantasy, while admitting its preference for plurality.

The Moor sees the parallel between his double-speed life, the untimely passing of the era of tolerance in India and the disorienting pace of an increasingly meaningless global modern life:

> How many of us feel, these days, that something that has passed too quickly is ending: a moment of life, a period of history, an idea of civilisation, a twist in the turning of the unconcerned world. [...] I have been passing too quickly, too. A double-speed existence permits only half a life. [...] In Bombay [...] we think we're on top of the modern age, we boast that we're natural techno fast-trackers, but that's only true in the high-rises of our minds. Down in the slums of our bodies we're still vulnerable to the most disorderly of disorders. (p.145)

The Moor catches the mood of general Postmodern uncertainty and anxiety expressed through India's situation, and from a particular secularist political viewpoint.

Rushdie describes the Moor's ageing as a representation of a much more general feeling:

> I think a lot of us feel these days that things are rocketing fast, you know that history, or even our lives [...] are racing passed us, out of control, and [...] I think history is moving much faster than it ever used to [...] and so first of all I just wanted to [...] make concrete that metaphor.[32]

This is an aesthetic expression of Alvin Toffler's 'future shock'[33] and David Harvey's 'time–space compression'.[34] Toffler, Harvey and other commentators have argued that the speed and diversity of technological, economic and social changes have created deep strains on societies.

In 1970 Toffler argued that the acceleration of change in industrial societies 'lies behind the impermanence—the transience—that penetrates and tinctures our consciousness, radically affecting the way we relate to other people, to things, to the entire universe of ideas, art and values'.[35] This society demands that people and their social structures become ever more adaptable, developing 'a throw-away mentality to match our throw-away products' (p.50). Such rapid social and conceptual changes lead to fears 'that the system is somehow flying out of control' (p.165). Toffler notes that 'America is tortured by uncertainty with respect to money, property, law and order, race, religion, God, family and self. [...] All the techno-societies are caught up in the same massive upheaval' (p.268).

As values themselves turn over 'faster than ever before in history' Toffler warns that this 'implies temporariness in the structure of both public and personal value systems' (p.269). Each new value system is inherently transient and short-lived, whatever it represents. The condition of accelerated change becomes the only certainty in an increasingly uncertain world. 'Future shock' is the 'disease' (p.430) that afflicts people who cannot cope with this uncertainty.

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[32] Rushdie, in Lee, *Kaleidoscope*, Radio 4.
[33] Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), p.44.
[34] Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, pp.240-359 (p.240).
[35] Toffler, *Future Shock*, p.18.

Toffler's thesis owed a considerable amount of its energy to the excitement generated by the internationally accelerating industrial societies that it attempted to encompass. His analysis itself has been rendered partially obsolete by subsequent political and economic events amid a swelling reaction to the throw-away society demonstrated in growing ecological concerns, and calls for more sustainable and less exploitative economies.

However, despite the ending of the heady sixties excitement about the possibilities and dangers of acceleration, that acceleration process itself has not stopped, and still informs contemporary Postmodern thinking. Postmodern writers write from within and about societies that they cannot grasp fully or order, and that change even before their work is completed.

David Harvey offers a more jaundiced, Marxist, contemporary account of 'future shock' as 'time–space compression'.[36] He claims that:

> In periods of confusion and uncertainty, the turn to aesthetics [...] becomes more pronounced. [...]
>
> The crisis of overaccumulation that began in the late 1960s and which came to a head in 1973 has generated exactly such a result. The experience of time and space has changed, the confidence in the association between scientific and moral judgements has collapsed, aesthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern. (pp.327-28)

Harvey also sees people's relationship with society changing under economic pressures, and he specifically links the rise of Postmodern culture with the stresses of multinational capitalism.

However, Harvey simplistically claims that Postmodern art and literature is the irresponsible expression of a warped society. While the excitement in Toffler's work does express some of the aesthetic tendencies of the Postmodern condition

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[36] Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, p.vii.

Harvey condemns, Postmodern literature has a more complicated relationship with its society. The Moor's fantastic ageing is a highly ambiguous symbol of his times, physically expressing the disjunction between his mind and body, culture and relationships.

The Moor often draws parallels between his speeded-up condition and the reckless speed of modern life. He compares the rate of his physical maturity to Bombay's rapid development:

> Like the city itself, Bombay [...] I mushroomed into a huge urbane sprawl of a fellow, I expanded without time for proper planning, without any pauses to learn from my experience or my mistakes or my contemporaries, without time for reflection. How then could I have turned out to be anything but a mess? (*MLS*, pp.161-62)

The Moor's rapid growth causes him considerable problems: 'My inside and outside have always been out of sync' (p.162). He is at odds with himself and his society. At three and a half a schoolteacher 'refused to accept the truth about my condition' and insisted that he was a 'sub-normal' seven-year-old, too old for Kindergarten (p.188). Even the Moor's own father 'was certainly mystified' (p.174) by him, either bringing him children's clothes for his adult body, or adult books for his child's mind (p.175).

The Moor himself is deeply unhappy about his ageing, calling it a 'double curse' (p.162):

> It first denied me the first fruits of childhood, the smallness, the *childishness* of being a child, and then departed, so that by the time I had indeed become a man I no longer possessed the golden-apple beauty of youth. (p.162)

In *Poor Things,* Godwin Baxter considers smallness in childhood to be its curse, because it allows children to be terrorised, and Bella's great advantage is that she grows up without fear or knowing that she is unusual. The Moor, on the other hand, both understands what is normal and longs for that same normality. He

wants to be recognised as a child, not treated as a freak. Unlike Bella, he is small for a while and his mind does not age fast to catch up with his body. He spends his childhood in hospitals and seeing gurus as his parents try to find a cure.

The Moor relates his pain to the experience of super-heroes who just want to be normal (*MLS*, p.152 and p.164), so tries to create a secret identity to hide his true nature. He tries to slow his life 'by sheer force of personality' (p.153) by being relaxed. 'Cursed with speed, I put on slowness the way the Lone Ranger wore a mask' (p.152). Nothing works, however, and the Moor must continually strive to adapt, and accept his fate (p.163).

When the Moor is seduced at ten he wants to grow up mentally as well as physically for his girlfriend, to become 'a real man and not manhood's simulacrum' (p.192) even if it means living an even shorter life. But when he later meets the love of his life he is desperate to slow down his decline; 'With what hunger and rage I yearned to slow down the too-fast ticking of my unheeding internal clock! [...] Uma [...] made me hear Death's lightning footsteps' (p.192). As he ages and deteriorates, the gap between his mental and physical ages grows and the Moor never really manages to come to terms with this disjunction.

The Moor represents the spirit of his age to the painter Vasco Miranda, who tells Aurora to 'forget those damnfool realists! [...] Life is fantastic! Paint that – you owe it to your fantastic, unreal son' (p.174). Aurora uses the Moor as her model for her fantastic symbolic pictures precisely because he is fantastic. He not only associates himself with the unregulated growth of Bombay that his father is largely responsible for, but with the unregulated social life of his mother.

The Moor feels that he is forced 'to live out the literal truth of the metaphors so often applied to my mother and her circle[.] In the fast lane, on the fast track,

ahead of my time, a jet-setter right down to my genes, I burned [...] the candle at both ends' (*MLS*, p.161). Both of the Moor's parents live risky and reckless lives, both of them end violently.

Rushdie comments that 'actually a lot of characters in this book only have half a life [...] they die young, or their glorious career's suddenly truncated by a terrible mistake'.[37] Aurora and Abraham live longer than their relatives do; however, they too experience only partial lives because they separate themselves from each other, their parents and children. The Moor's condition is a physical example of the common disease in Rushdie's novel of living too fast and being out of control.

The Moor's deformed fist is totally useless until he learns to fight, and eventually it becomes the basis of his new identity as 'Hammer' (p.295) in the Underworld of Raman Fielding's gang. This could be seen as an ironic fulfilment of the desire of that other Fielding, in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*[38] to connect. The ugly fist is also a physical expression of the unacknowledged violence and brutality of the Moor and his family. Even Aurora, who paints optimistic paintings, çannot deny the darkness of the forces which divide her own family, and to which she has contributed: refusing to help her dying grandmother and being cursed with division in her family. She damages her own marriage and children, and finally disowns the Moor completely.

When the Moor is banished and inhabiting Fielding's Underworld, Aurora begins to paint different sorts of pictures of the Moor in Exile. On one side of several double panels she created an 'appallingly unguarded series of late self-

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[37] Rushdie, in Lee, *Kaleidoscope*, Radio 4.
[38] E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, ed. by Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1989, (1924)).

portraits' (*MLS*, p.303). On the other panels, Aurora created new visions of the Moor living in the invisible dark Underworld world of poverty, violence and crime.

Aurora not only abandons the Alhambra palace setting and sea-shore imagery of her earlier work 'but also the notion of "pure" painting itself' (p.301), physically linking art closer to life. She creates her invisible world from a 'collage' (p.301) of discarded rubbish. This debris invokes the terrible history and pain of the underclasses. In Aurora's paintings 'it was the people themselves who were made of rubbish, who were collages composed of what the metropolis did not value' (p.302).

Aurora has been forced to look beyond her political hopes for the potential of plurality to examples of its failures and darker potential. Rather than bringing liberty, plurality has at this time aided the exploitation of different layers of society, and pushed the most vulnerable people completely out of the Establishment's picture. This Postmodern novel refuses to suggest that multiplicity is always positive in our uncertain condition. Aurora examines another perspective on plural worlds when she forces the invisible world 'into visibility by the strength of her artistic will' (p.303), revealing its shameful degradation and exploitation by the visible world.

The exiled Moor becomes the negative image of plurality for Aurora, revelling in excesses of 'debauchery and crime' (p.303):

> the Moor-figure [...] appeared to lose, in these last pictures, his previous metaphorical rôle as a unifier of opposites, a standard-bearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol – however approximate – of the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi-allegorical figure of decay. Aurora had apparently decided that the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and mélange which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contained a potential for

> darkness as well as for light. This 'black Moor' was a new imagining of the idea of the hybrid – a Baudelairean flower, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest, of evil. (*MLS*, p.303)

Aurora deconstructs her own romantic Postmodern myth of plurality in these paintings. Rather than merely expressing her hopes for plurality she is forced to question her own beliefs.

Like Aurora's earlier paintings, Rushdie's previous novels also celebrated the creative cultural and social potential of irreverently mixing ideas and traditions. Rushdie placed himself on the side of plurality because 'throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings' (*IH*, p.394). This fear of inflexible and falsely totalising ideologies is another expression of the uncertain Postmodern condition theorised by Lyotard, where certainty has ceased to represent comfortable community and become the weapon of warring factions.

Rushdie has claimed that plurality not only encourages tolerance and defies repression, but also represents the possibility for dynamic development and creativity:

> *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling. [...] *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world.* [...] The argument between purity and impurity, which is also the argument between Robespierre and Danton, the argument between the monk and the roaring boy, between primness and impropriety, between the stultifications of excessive respect and the scandals of impropriety, is an old one; I say, let it continue. Human beings understand themselves and shape their futures by arguing and challenging and questioning and saying the unsayable; not by bowing the knee, whether to gods or to men. (*IH*, pp.394-95)

In this essay Rushdie expresses his personal 'existential'[39] rejection of old certainties and the rejection of the well-made linear form of realism. This is not the Modern reluctant recognition of uncertainty, which Spanos defines as the basis for Postmodern anti-Aristotelianism. This existentialism holds out the hope of progress not by agreement but by dialogue and dissent.

The characters of Danton and Robespierre personify the two extremes of this fundamental debate in Rushdie's work. After seeing the political struggles of Robespierre and Danton in Georg Buchner's play *Danton's Death*,[40] the Narrator of *Shame*[41] declares that 'This opposition – the epicure against the puritan – is [...] the true dialectic of history. Forget left-right, capitalism-socialism, black-white. Virtue versus vice, ascetic versus bawd, God against the Devil: that's the game' (*S*, p.240). The dialectic between 'virtue' and 'vice' is not a trivial theme, but represents the driving force of human achievement in Rushdie's work. The clash between emotions and beliefs, selfishness and duty underlies and energises every other argument.

Rushdie's novels present a complicated celebration of the plurality that allows such debates and portrays both the positive and negative potentials of these arguments. In *Shame*, the Narrator is confused because Danton and Robespierre both have attractive and repulsive sides. A friend suggests that the opposition between purity and impurity in *Danton's Death* is not based purely on personalities: '"The point is [...] that this opposition exists all right; but it is an internal dialectic." That made sense. The people are not only like Robespierre. They, we, are Danton, too. We are Robeston and Danpierre' (*S*, p.241).

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[39] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.15.
[40] Georg Buchner, *Danton's Death*, trans. by J. Maxwell (London: Methuen, 1968, (1961)). Orig. pub. (Germany: 1835).
[41] Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Picador, 1984). References hereafter to *S* in the text.

Rushdie's fiction always presents complex and ambivalent images of opposition. No character is purely evil or good, intolerant or all embracing, carrying the argument into every level and reflects both the freedom and fear of uncertainty. Aurora's later paintings express the negative, fearful aspect of uncertainty, which is the price of freedom. *The Moor's Last Sigh* also explores the negative aspects of plurality and uncertainty with the removal of the comforting aspects of certainty and moral guarantees of human rights. The text examines the expression of criminal, violent and selfish behaviour by many characters, including the Moor.

While Rushdie's earlier fiction presents many positive and negative aspects of plurality, *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the harshest and least optimistic examination of plurality that he has yet written. It reflects the current destruction of the political tradition of tolerance in India. However, this book continues to insist upon the inescapably plural nature of the world. As India travels away from political tolerance and secular pluralism, the Moor journeys away from the comforting certainty of that plurality towards dangerous and uncertain plurality. The events and attitudes of characters in the novel deeply undermine the myth of secular pluralism.

As events in Bombay reach their explosive climax, virtually every character who has been associated with the Moor is killed by bombs or publicly disgraced. Several characters who represented optimism and pluralistic hope in Rushdie's earlier novels are also present in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and destroyed. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai's infant stepson, Aadam Sinai, represented the hope of future generations. But Aadam matures here into a corrupt and incompetent yuppie, responsible for the mistake which brought down Abraham's

financial empire (*MLS*, pp.358-61). Rushdie suggests that Aadam changed from a symbol of hope into a sign of corruption because 'he had to be true to his generation'.[42]

Even the spirit of Bombay is listed among the casualties of the bombs. The Moor describes Bombay as 'an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everyone talked at once' (p.350). Rushdie used the image of the Ocean of the Streams of Story in his children's book *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.[43] The ocean where old ideas flow into one another and create new stories is a physical expression of the creative dialogue by which humanity progresses (*HSS*, p.72). However, after the violence and the destruction of everything he knows, the Moor feels completely divorced from the city. 'It was no longer my Bombay, no longer special, no longer the city of mixed-up, mongrel joy. Something had ended (the world?) and what remained, I didn't know' (*MLS*, p.376).

Despite the sudden violent destruction of virtually every remaining character, political secularism and pluralist Bombay, *The Moor's Last Sigh* does not suggest that pluralism is completely dead in India. At one point, the Moor considers that Abraham's unification of the Muslim criminal gangs under a Jewish Godfather is 'a dark, ironic victory for India's deep-rooted secularism' (p.332). This 'inter-community league of cynical self-interest' has occurred because 'people make the alliances they need'. In this novel, economic pragmatism undermines religious and ethnic bigotries. The Moor cynically feels that 'corruption was the only force we had that could defeat fanaticism' (p.332). Hindu Nationalism forces minority

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[42] Salman Rushdie, Conversation with myself, Book Reading, Edinburgh, 11 September 1995.
[43] Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta, 1990). References hereafter to *HSS* in the text.

groups to band together in order to protect themselves despite their own differences.

More positive images of the strength of plurality are also presented. As the Moor relates the destruction of his city and hopes, he mentions Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Education. This suggested that the British Empire should attempt to create a class of educated people '*Indian in blood and colour, but English in opinions, in morals, and in intellect*' (*MLS*, p.376). These, 'Macaulay's Minutemen', were to mediate between the British rulers and the Indian masses, and would be grateful because Indian culture was supposedly inferior to Western culture.

The Moor points out that, contrary to the opinion of the painter Vasco Miranda, the educated class in India had not become these 'Minutemen' because they still remained fully Indian, in both the best and worst of ways. At the very moment that pluralism seems to be dying in India at the hands of militant Hinduism, the Moor reminds readers that India defeated that last attempt to reduce it to a single vision. It was never a tropical Britain, and remains capable of destroying the unitary vision of Hindu nationalism.

The Moor's Last Sigh is a palimpsest, a Postmodern novel built on a realist structure. Different layers of the narrative compete with each other and conflict with the linear structure, parodying the certainty of end-oriented fiction through an exploration of the nature of plurality and increasing uncertainty. Even the romantic Postmodern myth of the positive effect of plurality is deconstructed, while simultaneously highlighting the inescapable political consequences of plurality, both good and bad.

THE POSTMODERN DETECTIVE

Spanos considers that Enlightenment metanarratives constructed a vision of the 'universe as a well-made fiction'[44] and that twentieth-century writers react against this. However, versions of realism have continued to remain a large part of twentieth-century popular culture and imagination in novels, films and television. Therefore, Postmodern texts cannot just reject realism but have actively to engage with it.

Both *Poor Things* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* parody detective fiction, the ultimate example of conclusion-oriented literature, by creating detectives who fail to conclude their mysteries satisfactorily. By undermining conclusion these texts are satirising:

> the *deus ex machina*, that formal device grounded in the Transcendental Signified which allows the traditional author to bring his drama or narrative to satisfying closure—and betrays his will to power over the recalcitrant differential being he would represent.[45]
>
> The conclusion of any narrative is a deliberate distortion of the continuous nature of experience.

Spanos links the 'programmed expectations' that fictional worlds manipulated towards certainty and closure to the 'well-made world of the corporate and totalitarian states' (p.24). Here 'the achievement of a total, that is, a preordained [...] structure—a "final solution"—is the defining activity' (p.24). Spanos believes that programmatic plot-based narratives, especially those written since the Enlightenment, are the literary equivalent of repressive totalitarian regimes, and have been used to support those regimes. Lyotard (*PE*, pp.77-78) and Rushdie (*IH*, p.394) have also claimed that the activity of imposing single solutions on

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[44] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.21.
[45] Ibid., p.20.

complex human situations is repressive and can lead to the objectification and then abuse of many people.

As Gray's and Rushdie's novels demonstrate, Postmodern fiction can react strongly against repressively over-simplistic ideas, while stopping far short of accusing all realist texts of collaborating with totalitarian regimes, or condemning all rational thought. Instead, the novels focus upon the plural nature of experience in response:

> It is [...] no accident that the postmodern literary imagination at large insists on the disorientating *mystery*, the ominous and threatening uncanniness of being that resists naming, and that the paradigmatic literary archetype it has discovered is the anti-detective story, [...] the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to 'detect' [...]—to track down the secret cause—in order to violently frustrate this impulse by refusing to solve the crime.[46]

Some Postmodern novels stress the strength of plurality by demonstrating the impotence of single metanarratives to encompass experience through the failure of characters to resolve their stories.

In *Poor Things,* the editor 'Alasdair Gray' acts as the detective trying to track down the truth behind the story of Bella Baxter. As the texts contradict themselves and each other, 'Gray' tries to impose his own reading on the material. But another expert contests his reading, which fails to live-up to the standards of historical proof that 'Gray' himself invokes.

'Gray' does discover many pieces of evidence, but he does not fill in all the remaining gaps to create a unifying narrative, instead he re-enforces the competing claims of all the dialogues. The puzzle remains unresolved, and the responsibility for making sense of the situation shifts to the readers. However, the directly contradictory nature of the dialogues means that whatever reading

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[46] Spanos, *Repetitions,* pp.24-25.

individuals choose, they are forced to acknowledge that it is personal and provisional, since equal weight is given to other options.

The Moor's Last Sigh parodies the violence of conclusion by arbitrarily destroying many of its loose ends. It also contains two detective characters, Dom Minto, an elderly private eye employed by various members of the family, and then the Moor himself, who tries to find answers to several family tragedies. Minto's reputation has been established through his fictionalised exploits in movies and popular novels, and now his clients treat his reports as the complete truth, and as almost-divine revelations.

Minto had retired over the scandal in *Midnight's Children* which ended in murder and public controversy. After which 'the fantasists had taken over, creating the heroic super-sleuth of the cheap paperbacks and radio serials, [...] transforming him from an old has-been into a myth' (*MLS*, p.264). His involvement stuns the Moor, because Minto represents a fictional character rather than an actual person to the Moor as well as to the readers. The Moor likens him to many great fictional detectives, and describes him as 'this Bollywood Sherlock Holmes' (p.264).

Aurora, the Moor's mother, employs Minto to expose Uma, the Moor's lover, as a manipulative and unbalanced liar. Minto's report persuades the Moor to abandon Uma, but the report also teaches him that there may be more than one form of truth. When the Moor is confronted with evidence of Uma's actual life and mental state he cannot accept or deny it:

> Minto had been thorough; Aurora showed me documentation – birth and wedding certificates, confidential medical reports acquired by the usual greasing of already-slippery palms, and so on – which left little doubt that his account was accurate in all important particulars. Still my heart refused to believe. (p.267)

Minto and Aurora's sordid version of Uma claims that she 'did not love [the Moor, but] was simply a great actress, a predator of the passions, a fraud' (*MLS*, p.267). The Moor is forced to choose between his belief in and love for his family, and the truth of his own passion for Uma.

The Moor reluctantly concedes the 'overwhelming force' (p.267) of Minto's evidence, but the legitimacy of this evidence is not final. His choice is not based wholly upon truth and lies. He has to weigh the legitimacy of truth against the legitimacy of personal emotions: 'what mattered more: love or truth?' (p.267). If he rejects Uma, he knows that he will be condemning himself to a life without love.

For a time, the Moor does leave Uma, because her flexible approach to truth confuses him. She claims her version is a metaphor but the Moor does not believe her: 'It wasn't a metaphor, Uma. [...] It was a lie. What's scary is, you don't know the difference' (p.270). As the novel continues, the Moor becomes increasingly obsessed with finding out the ultimate truth and less clear whether or not he has found it. Eventually, he also fails to be able to tell the difference between metaphor, lies and truth.

Minto's evidence has apparently revealed the 'truth', but he has not solved the Moor's problem. His revelations about Uma force the Moor to confront her, and thus releases the dark forces which destroy the family. The Moor's emotions eventually reunite him with Uma, who destroys his relationship with his family and tries to kill him in a fake suicide pact. These traumatic events completely disorientate him, cutting him adrift from his family, his lover, and any certainty. Uma represents another facet of plurality in *The Moor's Last Sigh* that is both

positive and hideously destructive. She generates the deepest and purest passion in the Moor, but she also uses his love to try to control and then annihilate him.

The Moor's relatiónship with Uma changes radically several times, even after her death. After his family undermines his faith in Uma, the Moor feels that this represents 'a defeat for the pluralist philosophy' of his family (*MLS*, p.272):

> it had been the pluralist Uma, with her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth, who had turned out to be the bad egg; and Aurora had fried her - Aurora, that lifelong advocate of the many against the one, had with Minto's help discovered some fundamental verities, and had therefore been in the right. The story of my love-life thus became a bitter parable [...] for in it the polarity between good and evil was reversed. (p.272)

This aspect of Uma parallels the darker side of plurality as explored in the novel.

The possibilities unleashed by plurality include all negative and dangerous impulses. *The Moor's Last Sigh* highlights all aspects of plurality to avoid the trap of establishing a comforting metanarrative of positive plurality while rejecting other metanarratives. By acknowledging the social problems created by abandoning all myths, even Postmodern ones, the novel attempts to imagine how to adapt radically in such a plural world. To learn to survive without certainty is as difficult as learning to breath water in Aurora's 'Palimpstine' paintings.

When Uma dies in a bizarre accident during their supposed suicide pact, the Moor is confused by his discovery that one tablet is not lethal. He does not know whether she meant to kill herself or him:

> Was she a tragic heroine; or a murderess; or, in some way as yet unfathomable, both at once? There was a mystery in Uma Sarasvati which she had taken to her grave. I thought [...] that I had never known her, and would never know. (p.292)

The Moor considers her a strange Alice whom he has encountered in Wonderland.

Uma's plurality remains an unresolved mystery to the Moor because he cannot

reduce her into one vision, and so has to represent all options simultaneously. However, Uma seems to be thrown into sharp relief later in the text. The Moor discovers that she used his love deliberately to deceive his parents about him in a deeply hurtful manner, and was directly responsible for his family disowning him.

At this point, the Moor can hardly accept that Uma is human. He imagines her as a monster, 'a chameleon-like creature, a cold-blooded lizard from across the cosmos, who could take human form [...] for the express purpose of making as much trouble as possible, because trouble was its staple diet' (*MLS*, p.320). She died suddenly like 'some ancient malignity, unable to bear truth's light, [...] dissolving into dust' (p.321). He also describes her as 'absolute evil' (p.321) and insists on her being condemned not forgiven:

> *Mad or bad?* I no longer have a problem with that question [...] I will not allow her to be mad. Space-lizards, undead bloodsuckers and insane persons are excused from moral judgment, and Uma deserves to be judged. *Insaan*, a human being, I insist on Uma's insaanity. (p.322)

So the Moor creates a conundrum by word play: Uma must be fully human in order to be condemned.

Aoi Uë, another prisoner of Vasco Miranda, declares that her failed marriage is still the most important event in her life. Because 'defeated love is still a treasure, and those who choose lovelessness have won no victory at all' (p.425). Even the Moor's love, which was always a disguised betrayal, is to be valued, 'Still, you did love her. [...] You were not playing a part' (p.426). Even after Minto's truth about Uma is confirmed many times over and accepted by the Moor, the truth of his own experience of love is still valid.

When the Moor first realises that he has based his judgement of his family upon what Uma has told him rather than upon his previous opinions, he realises

that 'to give up one's own picture of the world and become wholly dependent on someone else's – was not that as good a description as any of the process of, literally, *going out of* one's mind?' (*MLS*, p.267). The Moor acknowledges that he has rejected all of his knowledge and opinions formed from personal experiences, which is the only possible method available to him for testing and legitimating truth, and taken Uma's opinions instead. However, he also loved Uma until his family tried to persuade him to accept their versions of her rather than his own.

Uma is not only a force for ill fortune in the Moor's life, but also a force for other realities in the text. She has a history of radically changing her personality to suit the person she is with and creating elaborate life-stories:

> It was possible that she no longer had a clear sense of an 'authentic' identity, [...] and this existential confusion had begun to spread beyond the borders of her own self and to infect, like a disease, all those with whom she came into contact. (p.266)

Uma becomes a destructive negative influence, generating confusion and lies in order to destabilise other peoples' lives. Uma's behaviour and its disastrous consequences demonstrate to both the Moor and the readers the fragile nature of truth and the impossibility of legitimating it.

Uma succeeds in damaging people because there is no certain way to distinguish between fact and fiction. The trust that is placed in her integrity, sanity and stories, both at her college (p.266), and in the Moor's family, is revealed to be the legitimating factor of what is seen as 'truth'. People justify extreme reactions, such as divorce and disownment, by their faith in Uma's words, or in her manipulation of what people have said. Without certain grounds upon which to judge, they reject 'truthful' protests.

To doubt Uma's integrity is to admit that truth lies only in the legitimacy of trust and that trust is not a firm ground for truth. When the Moor discovered her

deceit the 'floor fell away beneath my feet' (*MLS*, p.267). Uma destroys not only the social bonds of trust and language that bind families together but also reveals that those same social and linguistic bonds are the hopelessly inadequate, but only available, guarantees of 'truth'.

The Moor's experience of Uma undermines all of his previous certainties. Consequently he craves new certainties but cannot find grounds to establish any. The Moor's other great quest is to discover the 'truth' about his mother's death, which might be murder. Despite discovering the difficulty of establishing truth, the Moor now becomes a detective.

Abraham employs Minto to investigate Aurora's death:

> Minto of all people, blind, toothless, wheelchair-ridden, deaf, and kept alive, as he approached his century, by dialysis machines, regular blood transfusions, and that insatiable and undiminished inquisitiveness which had taken him to the top of his professional tree! (p.330)

Minto has been reduced from a human being to merely the impulse to detect the truth. He can no longer move, see or hear; yet, ironically, he can still work as a private eye. The old detective is abstracted by the text, and further transformed from a fictional hero into an inhuman force, but that force is undermined.

Minto suspects Raman Fielding, but Minto dies before he can bring Fielding to justice. Abraham reports Minto's last conversation, during which Abraham claims that Minto has obtained a signed statement confirming Fielding as Aurora's murderer:

> Abraham said that Minto had not sounded his usual cantankerous, ebullient self. He was depressed, despondent, and spoke openly about death. 'Let it come! For me, all of existence has been a blue movie,' Minto reportedly stated. 'I have seen enough of what in human life is most filthy and obscene.' The next morning the old detective was found dead at his desk. 'Foul play', said the investigating officer, Inspector Singh, 'is not suspected.' (p.361)

Minto has not resolved the mystery of existence into a comforting and well-made whole, but spent his entire life looking into the darkest and most chaotic aspects of humanity. Finally, the never-ending uncertainty overwhelms him. Minto's final act is to be the victim of a possible crime rather than the detective, but the 'truth' of his death will remain a mystery. His final piece of evidence against Fielding also mysteriously disappears.

Abraham convinces the Moor that Fielding is guilty just by claiming that Minto had the document, so the Moor kills Fielding and thinks that he has solved his puzzle. It is only after Bombay explodes and the Moor is driven away from the illusion of familiarity and control that he discovers he was wrong. The Moor travels to Spain to find his mother's last paintings, but away from his familiar world he is lost:

> I had entered an unfamiliar state of mind. The place, language, people and customs I knew had all been removed from me by the simple act of boarding this flying vehicle; and these, for most of us, are the four anchors of the soul. [...] The new world I was entering had given me an enigmatic warning. [...] I was alone in a mystery, [...] this surreal foreignness whose meanings I could not begin, as yet, to decode. (*MLS*, p.383)

The Moor discovers that without the certainty of his well-known world he is free but cannot read this new existence. His confusion highlights the traditional tools and symbols used to domesticate existence and make it seem secure.

The removal of those symbols, 'place, language, people and customs' (p.383), reveals how weak the Moor's grasp of certainty is. European Spain becomes for the Indian Moor that Postmodern 'zone' of uncertainty which the East traditionally occupies in Western writing. This novel reverses the usual relationship between the normal and the exotic to underline the radical nature of

uncertainty, which is not confined to far-away lands. It is in this state of fantastic confusion that the Moor's final certainty about his mother's death is shattered.

Vasco Miranda has moved to a village that is peopled by bitter locals and shallow foreigners, the 'Parasites' (*MLS*, p.402), living separate lives in worlds that seem physically dislocated. The Moor considers the village to be a place where:

> people came [...] to lose themselves in themselves, [...] the air of mystery surrounding the place was in fact an atmosphere of unknowing; what seemed like an enigma was in fact a void. These uprooted drifters had become, by their own choice, human automata. (pp.402-03)

The Moor feels himself becoming part of this void while waiting to see Vasco, discovering that he has an 'absence of guilt – [...] suspended moral animation' (p.404) about murdering Fielding. It is only after the Moor's emotions recover that he can see Vasco (p.405).

A garbled tale alerts the Moor to the arrival of stolen paintings. 'It was not proof, but I knew it was the closest I would get, in this village of uncertainty, to a sure thing' (p.406). Although his experiences in Spain teach him to distrust all stories, he still attempts to act on their justification. When he enters Vasco's house, the 'Little Alhambra' (p.407), the Moor discovers that Vasco has tricked him yet again, and the Moor is now a captive. He has learnt not to trust stories but cannot find any alternative route to 'truth'.

The Moor descends into labyrinthine speculations about how far Vasco's plot has extended, and can no longer separate calculated betrayal from the normal confusions of experience. Faced with yet another example of the failure of logical deductions to expose truth, his obsessive need to solve his particular puzzles becomes stronger: 'I felt my reason slipping its moorings, and restrained my

speculations, baseless and valueless as they were. The world was a mystery, unknowable. The present was a riddle to be solved' (*MLS*, p.413). Although he acknowledges that he cannot solve the world, which constantly defeats him, he still believes that he can solve his own existence. However, Vasco, the criminally insane, finally appears to solve the puzzle of his mother's death, and simultaneously destroys the Moor's faith in truth.

Vasco shows the Moor a letter from Aurora announcing her killer's portrait painted beneath her last painting, 'The Moor's Last Sigh'. 'So here, at last, in this time of mirages, this place of sleights, was a simple fact. I took the letter and my mother spoke to me from beyond the grave' (p.416). The Moor believes that he already knows her killer, however 'there was no doubt that the canvas was a palimpsest' (p.416), which covers not Fielding's portrait but Abraham's.

Aurora's posthumous accusation of his father destroys the Moor's certainty. The victim, not the amateur detective, appears to solve this crime. The Moor is left reeling in a world of random trivial and serious questions and speculation. He realises that he has seen no evidence of Fielding's guilt. The Moor was only told about a statement which 'never in fact materialis[ed], but on the evidence of which I went forth to bludgeon a man to death' (p.417). His trust in the integrity of written evidence extended to trusting in its physical existence as well as its 'truth'. He now sees that there are no grounds for trusting his father's account: 'why should I believe a word of that Minto story, after all?' (p.418).

The Moor is uncertain about his father's evidence, but also about his mother's accusation, and whether or not Aurora or Abraham was guilty of any betrayal or murder. The Moor no longer believes anyone's narrative, and cannot chose between them:

> O, I was lost in fictions, and murder was all around. – My world was mad, and I was mad in it. [...] How, when the past is gone, when all's exploded and in rags, may one apportion blame? How to find meanings in the ruin of a life? – One thing was certain; I was fortune's, and my parents', fool. (*MLS*, p.418)

The Moor's detective efforts have revealed more conflicting and untrustworthy evidence than he can make sense of, and his conclusions have disintegrated.

Even if the readers provisionally accept one solution to the crime, speculation and confusion obscure the motivation so that the weight of guilt is uncertain. The Moor's earlier urgings to judge Uma are silenced by the deeper mystery of his parents. The only solution he can find is the impossibility of establishing truth and the fact of his own dangerously gullible readiness to believe any plausible story.

The Moor's Last Sigh demonstrates 'the impulse of the contemporary Western writer to refuse to fulfill causal expectations, to provide "solutions" for the "crime" of existence'.[47] The Moor's desperate need for solutions is constantly frustrated. 'The dislocating mystery still survives the brutal effort to coerce the duplicitous many into the certain One' (p.26). The novel demonstrates that the Moor's reasoning rests upon fictions and fails to contain the flexibility of experience. His subsequent stream of random, disjointed questioning is interrupted not by the return of order, but by the alternative disorder of the physical experiences of an uncomfortable floor and fear of a madman with a gun.

Spanos suggests that the purpose of Postmodern novels is to:

> generate rather than purge anxiety and dread: to 'destructure'[48] [...] Western Man's sedimented metaphysical presuppositions and thus to de-center and dislodge his tranquilized proper self from [...] the domesticated, the scientifically charted, organized, and leveled world, into immediate encounter with 'the things themselves.'[49]

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[47] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.19.
[48] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp.41-49.
[49] Spanos, *Repetitions*, pp.26-27.

Spanos further claims that Postmodern deconstruction of established order liberates people to find direct contact with experience, and escape the stifling bonds of conventions.

He also claims that 'the dread of Nothing [...] becomes the agency not just of despair but also and simultaneously of hope, [...] of freedom, the infinite possibility of free play'.[50] Although anxiety about the world is uncomfortable, he considers this a price worth paying for more authentic and freer lives. However, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Poor Things* do not seem entirely to demonstrate Spanos's opinions about the purposes of Postmodern novels.

Both novels generate anxiety and strip away conventional certainties, but their complicated and open dialogues and structures do not generate a sense of closeness to essential nature and experience. Postmodern literature does not replace the worn-out illusion of the transcendent certainty of the well-made narrative with a new and authentic transcendent certainty about the uncertain plurality of existence.

The Postmodern purpose is neither a unitary and deliberate philosophical purpose nor a revelation of 'truth'. The Postmodern 'truth' of the uncertainty of the contemporary age is a provisional and specific experience. It seems to best reflect and engage the Postmodern moment, rather than claim a contradictory transcendent metaphysical status.

These novels also examine the desperately high price of freedom, as characters are free to abuse, be abused, and fail to bring about Postmodern pluralist utopias. *Poor Things* ends in the abject defeat of the possibilities of Bella Baxter, and *The Moor's Last Sigh* is not a celebration of but an elegy for plural tolerance in India.

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[50] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.28.

The Moor ends his narrative sitting within sight of the original Alhambra fortress, symbol of the Moorish multi-cultural empire:

> The Alhambra, [...] that monument to a lost possibility, [...] to that most profound of our needs, to our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self. [...] I watch it vanish in the twilight. (*MLS*, p.433)

The Moor has encountered the plurality of experience but his efforts to order it into a comforting myth of tolerance and ethical values have been defeated. Bleaker, repressive aspects of plurality seem to be in the ascendant at the close of the novel, rather than the possibilities of freedom and tolerance.

ANTI-QUEST FICTION

Spanos argues that 'the paradigmatic literary archetype [that the postmodern literary imagination] has discovered is the anti-detective story'.[51] Postmodern fiction, such as Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, certainly subverts the detective thriller genre, but this is not the only genre to be subverted or parodied. The 'whodunit?' detective story developed during the nineteenth century, branching from realist literature, however the detective impulse has been present in many forms in narrative fiction.

Sartre relates detective fiction to quest stories when he describes Nathalie Sarraute's *Portrait of a Man Unknown* as:

> an anti-novel that reads like a detective story. In fact, it is a parody on the novel of 'quest' into which the author has introduced a sort of impassioned amateur detective who [...] doesn't find anything, or *hardly* anything, and he gives up his investigation as a result of a metamorphosis; just as though Agatha Christie's detective, on the

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[51] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.24.

> verge of unmasking the villain, had himself suddenly turned criminal.[52]

The detective genre is the most extreme example of plot-oriented literature, however other forms of Aristotelian literature, such as the far older quest genre, also aim towards the goal of concluding the puzzles of the plot into a final order.

Part of the ethos of the detective story is that the detective is a disinterested and objective observer, with a certain 'all-encompassing "eye"'[53] which can see the whole problem at once and link all of the clues. However, Postmodern detectives are not always distant and neutral about the puzzles they attempt to solve. In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* deep emotions of loss drive the Moor to investigate his mother's death and to find her last paintings. Rather than becoming an indifferent observer he becomes involved and 'sets out on a kind of quest journey'[54] of personal discovery.

In the essay 'Adventures and Epics',[55] Rushdie discusses adventure fiction and travel literature where both fictional and actual travellers appear to be following their own personal, even eccentric, quests. In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities,*[56]

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[52] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Preface', to *Portrait of a Man Unknown*, by Nathalie Sarraute, trans. by Maria Jolas (London: Calder, 1959), pp.vii-xiv (p.viii). Orig. pub. (Paris: Gallimard, 1956).

Agatha Christie's detective thrillers were constructed not as puzzles but as revelations, since they were based on the premise that readers should not be able to deduce the criminal before he or she was revealed by the detective. Christie achieved this by generating many confusing motives and suspects, false trails, strange clues, and masking vital pieces of evidence from the readers. She even uses the device of turning the detective into the criminal on several occasions in order to maintain her surprise and control, rather than to subvert her genre, although inevitably the text and the trickery of the plot subvert the form. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, (London: Harper Collins, 1983, (1926)), the narrator, who is supposedly assisting Hercule Poirot, is revealed to be the murderer. In *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (London: Collins, 1975), a posthumous letter from Poirot admits that he was the killer. These novels make the detective seem even more omnipotent and super-human, reconfirming the strength of their, and Christie's, manipulative powers of reason over confusing events and people.

[53] Spanos, *Repetitions,* p.18.

[54] Lee, *Kaleidoscope*, Radio 4.

[55] Salman Rushdie, 'Adventures and Epics', *New York Times*, *Magazine*, part 2, 17 June 1991, pp.26-27.

[56] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg, 1974). Orig. pub. (Italy: Giulio Einaudi, 1972).

Marco Polo has 'a whole series of such quests in mind', including his future, Venice, memories and happiness. Rushdie feels that 'Such conceits, exquisite and comic, suggest parodies of the ancient myth of the Holy Grail'.[57] The quest for the Grail is another aspect of humanity's metaphysical search for certainty and transcendence.

Rushdie suggests that the disrespectful contemporary reaction to the Grail myth highlights a major difference between pre-Enlightenment and Postmodern thought:

> To invoke the grail is to realize that adventure, as it is understood today, has lost a certain high-minded grandeur, and that the loss lies in the area of purpose. Once upon a time the journey, the quest, the adventure was not so much a private, or idiosyncratic, or crazy enterprise as a spiritual labor. (p.26)

The quest adventure was a metaphor of the search for God's truth, answering the common questions of humanity. An adventure of this kind, like *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan or *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid ud-Din 'Attar,[58] was 'an adventure of purification, of winning through to the divine'.[59] A quest was a dramatic example of how to live a good and meaningful life despite all tribulations.

Most modern adventures have lost the common bond of general social example and single spiritual goal. 'Like the line of sight in a Gothic cathedral, the adventuring spirit was swept forward and upward in the direction of God. This allegorical, transcendent adventuring is, these days, more or less completely

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[57] Rushdie, 'Adventures and Epics', p.26.
[58] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. and intro. by Roger Sharrock (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1965, (1678 and 1684)); and Farid ud-Din 'Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984), orig. (Persia c.AD 1177).
[59] Rushdie, 'Adventures and Epics', p.26.

defunct'.[60] In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*[61] the stranded schoolboys descend into a state of savagery and attack each other, rather than exploring their own qualities and comradeship through adventure.

The aims of most modern travellers have become personal and more or less trivial, as western societies have fragmented and their aims and aspirations have become distinct and specific. Rather than showing society how to reach God and certainty, these modern adventurers demonstrate that people are not necessarily as helpless or hopeless as they sometimes believe.

They escape 'from their own roots, from the prison of everyday reality [...] reminding us that change, difference, strangeness, newness, risk and achievement really do exist, and can, if we wish, be attained'.[62] They act as antidotes to the paralysing uncertainty of the post-industrial age, and attempt to use uncertainty to fulfil their own needs. This is not an Eastern or a Medieval Western idea of spiritual quest, approaching but never reaching an ancient wisdom, or only attaining enlightenment by giving up earthly life, but a new, provisional journey, without guarantees.

Rushdie argues that grand adventure is no longer an entirely positive metaphor. Because 'like all important ideas, adventure has a dark side as well as a light. [...] [W]hen states or their leaders [...] go adventuring—the results are usually catastrophic' (p.27). While mythic adventurers seemed distant and noble, historical adventurers 'from Genghis Khan to Napoleon and Mussolini' (p.27) have used the myth of a spiritual goal to legitimate war, conquest and suffering.

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[60] Rushdie, 'Adventures and Epics', p.27.
[61] William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999, (1954)).
[62] Rushdie, 'Adventures and Epics', p.27.

Postmodern literature parodies the legitimating purpose of the quest and in the process suggests that adventure may take on alternative meanings:

> To a Saharan nomad [...] the journey itself is the point, the shaping fact of existence; arriving at some notional destination—'conquering the desert'—is a kind of fiction, the illusion of an end. Adventures tend to be linear narratives, but in life as in literature that's not the only way of seeing things.[63]

It is possible to undermine the traditional 'fiction' of the purpose of quests by demonstrating the alternative legitimacy of the process of travel itself rather than the notional destination or goal. In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* the Moor fails to unravel the mystery of his parents or his own life, or achieve closer union with his mother. However, his journey into failure teaches him that he has been asking the wrong sorts of questions and that the world is far too great and complicated to be ordered by his expectations.

According to Rushdie:

> Contemporary literary travelers tend, it being an antiheroic age, to be more Huck than Chuck. Their true ancestors are not, perhaps, so much the wandering heroes of the classical epoch (Jason, Ulysses, unspeakably pious Aeneas) as the picaros of the novel. Many of the most appealing pieces of modern 'travel writing' read very like 20th-century picaresque novels, offering us the notion of adventure as mad-quest.(p.26)

The picaresque novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy*,[64] also parodied epic quests. They did this to push back literary and social frontiers, and to puncture the pompous illusions of their age.

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[63] Rushdie, 'Adventures and Epics', p.27.

[64] Henry Fielding, *History of Tom Jones - a Foundling* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973, (1749)); and Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. by Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, (1759-67)).

Perhaps one of the most important ideas of contemporary anti-quests is that the power of adventure 'may have much to do with the pushing back of frontiers, but few topographical boundaries can rival the frontiers of the mind'.[65] Many Postmodern texts use the conventions of the quest to express the possibilities of breaching frontiers and boundaries not only of formal styles but also of traditional ideas and modes of thought.

CARNIVAL, MENIPPEAN SATIRE AND POSTMODERN LITERATURE

Brian McHale also notes the strong connections between Postmodern fiction and the anti-quest, picaresque tradition, including Menippean Satire, from which the picaresque novels developed. McHale attempts to theorise an underlying order in the seemingly disordered structure of Postmodern literature by suggesting that since it grew out of the tradition of Menippean Satire it is therefore founded upon the principles of carnivalised literatures.

McHale bases his argument on his reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of carnival and carnivalised literature and their influence on the work of Fyodor Dostoevsky.[66] However, an alternative analysis of carnivalised literature and Postmodern fiction reveals some highly significant differences. While, arguably, Postmodern literature has grown out of this carnivalised literary tradition, it has developed in many new directions.

According to Bakhtin, ancient carnival rituals influenced many forms of literature, leading to the creation of the 'serio-comical' (p.106) genres and

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[65] Rushdie, 'Adventures and Epics', p.27.

[66] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson, intro. by Wayne C. Booth, Theory and History of Literature, 8 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Orig. pub. (Leningrad, USSR: Priboi, 1929; rev. ed. Moscow, USSR: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963).

contributing to the development of the novel.[67] The carnival was a festival that everyone participated in at set holiday times. It had its own internal logic that differed from normal life, and had its own carnival laws while the carnival lasted, during which time ordinary laws and the genuine fears provoked by non-carnival society were suspended. These conditions led to the levelling of normal social hierarchies and to '*free and familiar contact among people*' (p.123) which allowed them to interrelate in new ways.

Carnival encouraged eccentricity and led to '*carnivalistic mésalliances*' where free and familiar contact was extended to 'all values, thoughts, phenomena, and things' (p.123). Consequently, categories which were generally distant and self-enclosed were 'drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations' (p.123). Common examples include a uniting of the sacred with the profane, and the high with the low. Carnival '*profanation*' (p.123) debased the sacred down to the earthly level, linking the spiritual with the bodily.

So carnival thought was not abstract but reflected traditional beliefs and its specific acts highlight the most important element of carnival, 'the image of constructive death' (p.125). The ritual crowning and de-crowning of the carnival king, which Bakhtin describes as the 'primary carnivalistic act' (p.124), demonstrates the 'very core of the carnival sense of the world—*the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal.* Carnival is the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time' (p.124).

Deeply ambivalent dualities characterise carnival and the '*joyful relativity*' (p.124) of all positions in carnival. Carnival laughter and parody was directed at solemn, serious and sacred objects, 'for everything is reborn and renewed through

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[67] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 107.

death'.[68] Carnival images 'always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa. Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth' (p.125).

Change and multiplicity were essential elements of carnival. Carnival was fundamentally 'opposed to that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness which is dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change, which seeks to absolutize a given condition of existence or a given social order' (p.160). There are clear connections to Postmodern thought here but carnival is not nearly as radically Postmodern an idea as it might appear. Carnival, after all, held diverse ideas together in a unity that celebrates connections and renewal.

Carnival laws did not extend beyond the set carnival period, and were only able to exist at all through the tolerance of the normal, non-carnival ruling-powers. Ultimately carnival was part of a larger carnival duality, that of the carnival and the non-carnival times, containing the inevitable renewal of the non-carnival world within itself. Rather than actively changing society, carnival could only encourage the secular and religious authorities to renew themselves. Carnival was a tool of the status quo, acting as a perhaps essential safety valve for the rigid non-carnival world. It allowed citizens to release their frustrations in a controlled and regulated fashion without seriously threatening social structures or people in power.

The Renaissance was the period when carnival reached its peak, but it began to decline in the early seventeenth century. After this period carnival 'almost completely ceased to be a direct source of carnivalization, ceding its place to the influence of already carnivalized literatures; in this way carnivalization becomes a

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[68] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p.127.

purely literary tradition'.[69] Postmodern literature is therefore connected to the ideas of carnival only by three centuries of extensive literary developments, and its carnivalised aspects are due entirely to the legacy of this literary tradition, divorced from the original motivations of pure carnival.

In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale extensively lists the carnivalised features which Postmodern novels have in common with carnival itself and Menippean Satire. He suggests that these examples demonstrate 'how postmodernist fiction has reconstituted both the formal and the topical or motival repertoires of carnivalized literature' (*PF*, p.173), but he also asserts that Postmodern fiction 'has gone even further than that toward recovering its carnival roots' (pp.173-74).

McHale claims that 'carnival continues to be the implicit "connecting principle"' for carnivalized literature (p.174), but it has been lost as a '*model*' for that literature. He concludes that Postmodern images of circuses, wild parties and fully-fledged carnivals, such as the Schweinheldfest in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*[70] are returns to the carnival model. He finally finds that carnival images and utopian themes come together in the Postmodern '*topos* of revolution' (*PF*, p.175):

> This is not political or social revolution, however, so much as it is ludic and sexual revolution, revolution *as* carnival; its real-world models are the May Events in Paris and the Prague Spring. Dionysian outbursts of energy, anarchic and iconoclastic. (p.175)

There are several problems with McHale's parallel between carnival and Postmodern literature. His contention that reintroducing images of carnival, even if only of reduced kinds, is a deep return to carnival as a model for carnivalized

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[69] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p.131.
[70] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Picador, Pan, 1975, (1973)).

literature, is refuted by Bakhtin. Bakhtin holds that to understand carnival properly 'one must dispense with the over-simplified understanding of carnival found in the *masquėrade* line of modern times, and even more with a vulgar bohemian understanding of carnival'.[71] Bakhtin describes the masquerade as 'having absorbed into itself a whole series of carnivalistic forms and symbols (mostly of an externally decorative sort)' (p.130). The masquerade adopts only the appearance of carnival, and the essential carnival thought is lost. A return to literary images of carnival is therefore only a superficial link with carnival, not a sign of a deep connection.

Even more seriously flawed is McHale's idea that carnival thought is strongly present in Postmodern fiction, acting as the 'connecting principle' (*PF*, p.174) of Postmodernism's heterogeneous form, and that carnival is expressed through 'Dionysian outbursts' (p.175). Postmodern literature is indeed an expression of 'Dionysian outbursts of energy, anarchic and iconoclastic' (p.175). At the same time, both Postmodern literature and the events of 1968 in Paris and the Prague Spring can arguably be described as primarily concerned with social and political revolutions as well as being about 'ludic and sexual' revolution. The Postmodern spirit is in spontaneous and unconstrained revolution, deconstructing and iconoclastically destabilising all comfortable and accepted norms and ways of thinking, but carnival does not express such a dangerous instability.

The carnival sense of the world was very different from the non-carnival; it reversed hierarchies and profaned the sacred. But it did so only in accordance with its own established rules, and only during its rigid carnival period. There was no sense of danger or risk involved in the carnival, and its joyful relativity and

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[71] Bakhtin, *Problems*, pp.159-60.

suspension of normal laws contributed to 'liberating one from fear'.[72] Although carnival parodied the solemn and laughed at authorities, according to Bakhtin, 'there is not a grain of nihilism in it, nor a grain of empty frivolity or vulgar bohemian individualism' (p.160).

McHale quotes a passage from Monique Wittig's contemporary novel, *Les Guérellères*, where women are in revolt:

> They say that they foster disorder in all its forms. Confusion troubles violent debates disarray upsets disturbances incoherences irregularities divergences complications disagreements discords clashes polemics discussions contentions brawls disputes conflicts routs débâcles cataclysms disturbances quarrels agitation turbulence conflagrations chaos anarchy.[73]

The women intend, according to McHale, 'not just to overthrow men but to topple the entire culture that men have created, including male-dominated material culture' (*PF*, p.175).

This is violent, demonstrates a considerable amount of 'vulgar bohemian individualism'[74] and actively seeks to change the world permanently, without a hint of carnival's joyful constructive death, and cycle of constant renewal. This represents the total death of male society, not its renewal, and its replacement with a wholly new situation, not a rebirth of the old.

Postmodernism's restless deconstructive strategies are dangerously double-edged devices, as they undermine all positions and orders in a fundamental manner. Postmodern novels do not ask authorities to renew themselves, but tear down the illusion of authority from all power and ideas. These include those ideas held dear by Postmodern authors and readers, such as the Socialism of Alasdair

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[72] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p.160.
[73] Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. by David LeVay (London: Women's Press, 1979, (1971)), p.93. Orig. pub. (Paris: Editions de Miniut, 1969).
[74] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p.160.

Gray that is undermined in *Poor Things*. No idea or position is protected from this technique.

As well as freeing texts to revel in the euphoria of the almost limitless creative possibilities that chaos possesses, Postmodern deconstruction also demands a high price of self-awareness. It contains a real fear of uncontrolled anarchy, practical stagnation and philosophical stalemate. These two moods of intoxicating euphoria and paralysing despair compete for dominance within Postmodern literature, tending to balance irresponsibility with pessimism.

Postmodern revolution is far more radical than carnival, and stems from its development out of Enlightenment thought. When carnival began to wane in the early seventeenth century, its ancient view of the world also began to fade. It was only after this time that Europe and America began to experience popular and radical revolutions, which were lastingly successful. Carnival's revolution for the day was replaced by the ideals of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Equality as a permanent right, and faith in linear, rational, technological progress eclipsed cyclical, temporary free familiarity.

Postmodern literature is the latest literary attempt to deal with Western civilisation's subsequent disillusionment with the Enlightenment. But it is still formed in the post-Enlightenment world, and is unwilling, if not unable, to return to the older carnival view to legitimate hopes of renewal. It is not possible to reduce Postmodernism 's multiple contradictions, ambivalences and ambiguities to the state of dualistic coexistent partners in the single, and in some respects necessarily conservative, business of cyclical renewal, death, birth and the organic flow of time.

The crucial differences between Postmodern literature and ancient carnival seem to indicate that carnival is not the connecting principle of this particular version of carnivalized literature. The images of carnival in Postmodern novels are also far more informed by Postmodern deconstructive parody than carnival laughter. They disrupt and terrify rather than necessarily renew the Postmodern worlds positively. Examples can be found in the many circuses, fairs and sideshows in *The Infernal Desire Machine of Dr Hoffman*[75] by Angela Carter.

This fear of the carnival is the result of the destruction of the traditional carnival and non-carnival duality and the radically different way of looking at the world which replaced it. Postmodern literature is indeed a contemporary example of carnivalized literature, but it is not a new avatar of carnival. Its particular use of carnival features as deconstructive agents is made possible precisely because they are no longer founded in a common carnival world-view.

The shift in thinking between Postmodern literature and carnival also indicates the essential difference between Postmodern fiction and Menippean Satire. McHale notes the many common stylistic features and plot similarities of Postmodern literature and Menippean Satire, but fails to highlight the overwhelming thematic unity of Menippean Satire and its single-minded search for absolute, universal truth.

Menippean Satire was only one of many forms of literature that carnival influenced. It developed in Greece around the third century BC, and clearly demonstrates seriocomical and carnival ideas. Menippean Satire uses carnival methods to test ideas through provocative situations, debunk authority and

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[75] Angela Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machine of Dr Hoffman* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1982, (1972)).

privileges, deny absolutes, and enjoy the imaginative energies of abundance, ambivalence, variety and joyful relativity of carnival.

According to Bakhtin, Menippean Satire, was the '*universal genre of ultimate questions*',[76] dramatising a search for the truth of basic, universal ethical and practical philosophical questions. Characters generally journeyed between different worlds, social utopias, Heaven, Hell and the Earth, from palaces to gutters, to engage in threshold dialogues and to test ideas. This genre freed itself from the plots of traditional legends and historical subjects, concerned itself with current topical issues, and freely used fantastic elements to give new perspectives and to provoke testing situations.

Menippean Satires were more comic than previous seriocomical literatures, and delighted in showing sharp rises and falls, abrupt transitions and sudden juxtapositions. They included experiences of moral and psychological instability, such as madness, dreams showing alternative worlds and lives, and dialogues between the self, as well as many deliberate violations of the norms and traditions of social life. These violations were neither tragically catastrophic nor comically amusing as in older genres. Menippean Satires frequently inserted other genres, such as novellas, letters, speeches and others, to contribute to its multi-stylistic and multi-voiced character.

However, the creative use of fantasy in Menippean Satire 'is internally motivated, justified by, [...] devoted' and 'subordinated to the purely ideational function of provoking and testing a truth. The most unrestrained and fantastic adventures are present here in organic and indissoluble artistic unity with the

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[76] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 146.

philosophical idea'.[77] The fantastic is not used to represent any alternative 'truth', but only attempts to provoke and test the 'truth'.

Bakhtin strongly holds that Menippean Satire is not a fragmented nor random genre: 'We must again emphasize the organic unity of all these seemingly very heterogeneous features, the deep internal integrity of this genre' (p.119). Bakhtin attributes this unity to its development during the upheaval of beliefs and world-views of an era that culminated in the formation of Christianity. This epoch was one 'when national legend was already in decay, amid the destruction of those ethical norms that constituted the ancient idea of "seemliness"' (p.119).

It was also a time 'of intense struggle among numerous and heterogeneous religious and philosophical schools and movements' (p.119). In Menippean Satire 'the content of life was poured into a stable form that possessed an *inner logic*, insuring the indissoluble linking up of all of its elements' (p.119). So Menippean Satire was used as a valuable means of trying to make sense of a time of great philosophical and social upheaval.

Carnival passed into Western culture through the influence of Menippean Satire on later works, and the continuing vitality of carnival thought and carnival itself while it lasted. Carnival and Menippean Satire influenced a number of Medieval Mystery plays and other Christian writings, picaresque novels, Renaissance works by Rabelais and Cervantes and Postmodern literature.

Postmodern literature does follow Menippean Satire closely in many respects. But the Postmodern approach to searching for the answers of ultimate questions and the testing of 'truths' at the highest and lowest extremes of experience cannot be viewed as a similarly unified process. The use of fantasy in Postmodern

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[77] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p.114.

literature can also be read as representing as well as provoking alternative ideas, and furthermore may be as important aesthetically as it is philosophically.

Postmodern literature does not confine its search for alternative ideas to ultimate philosophical questions. Postmodern novels raise a plurality of large and small questions about the nature of the Postmodern world and the lack of grounds for legitimacy. They also discuss the role and nature of literature itself in Postmodern society. As it is impossible to read Postmodern contradictions and confusions as carnival dualities, it is also impossible to view them as being unified by a single philosophical theme. The multiple and unresolved questions of Postmodern novels, combined with far greater plurality of consciousnesses, worlds and truths, 'means that Postmodern literature is more thoroughly heterogeneous than Menippean Satire, in thought and contents, as well as in style.

It is possible to note strong general connections between the wanderings of Menippean and later picaresque heroes and the journeys in Postmodern fictions. They travelled through different social, physical and spiritual worlds seeking answers and engaging in threshold dialogues. But it is difficult to consider *Poor Things* to be only one, unified journey. The many historical and literary journeys of Bella/Victoria, Archie and 'Gray' do not uncover a universal truth, the threshold dialogues do not clarify points but set up opposing positions where each story undermines the others.

Although the Moor acts like an Everyman figure, stumbling from the highest and noblest situations to the lowest and most degraded states, *The Moor's Last Sigh* is also disconnected and fragmented. It tells the story of many characters not just one, and sends its hero to find failure and paintings, not truth and God.

Neither of these novels works towards the celebration of renewal and the organic cycle of birth and death.

HETEROTOPIAS

McHale's organisation of Postmodern disorders by means of a stable and ancient literary form fails to convince because he attempts to construct a justifying myth from carnival traditions, which cannot hold the heterogeneous elements of Postmodern thought together. Postmodern literature emphasises doubt and plurality and resists all metanarratives, including literary metanarratives. In order to establish any common ground between Postmodern works it is crucial to consider whether contemporary thought, with its incredulity towards metanarratives, can still accommodate any form of justifying order, or whether the category of order itself has been completely undermined.

In *The Order Of Things,*[78] Michel Foucault questions how far order has actually disintegrated in Postmodern society. Foucault detects a very disturbing disorder in the impossible, fantastic, Chinese encyclopaedia of animals in Borges's essay:

> That passage from Borges kept me laughing a long time, though not without a certain uneasiness that I found hard to shake off. Perhaps because there arose in its wake the suspicion that there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclite*: [...] in such a state, things are 'laid', 'placed', 'arranged' in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all. (pp.xvii-xviii)

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[78] Michel Foucault, 'Preface', *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. by pub. (London: Tavistock, 1970) , pp.xv-xxiv. Orig. pub. (France: Gallimard, 1966).

Borges's list does not simply juxtapose fantastic animals with real ones, but establishes a new type of classification with every new item.

It is impossible to place any specific animal in one category exclusively, since the categories divide animals into those:

> (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.[79]

The alphabetical order suggests that the categories are listed according to a form of progress. However, each subsequent category destroys the concept of order here. Many of the 'categories could contain all real and imagined animals simultaneously, while others contain very few. These categories do not neatly sort animals and their combined effect is to undermine the possibility of establishing any stable relationship between the categories that could be meaningfully used to group animals.

Foucault suggests that Borges's fictions are '*Heterotopias*' (p.viii), where different, competing orders clash together in the impossible 'non-place of language' (p.xvii):

> *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things [...] to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias [...] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of

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[79] Jorge Luis Borges, in Foucault, *Order of Things*, p.xv. Orig. pub. in 'El Idioma Analítico de John Wilkins', *Otras Inquisiciones*, Obras Completas (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Emecé, 1960), pp.139-44 (p.142).

> grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences. [80]

While utópias are impossible to reach physically, they offer a comforting vision of society in an ideal state. Heterotopias are also distinct from reality but deny the stability of language as well as society. Not only has order left Postmodern narratives, but the subsequent disorder also undermines language itself. However, Foucault does not suggest that order has completely disappeared.

Heterotopias, such as many of Borges's fictions, do not reveal the absence of order, or its destruction, Foucault argues, but expose the very nature of order itself. He suggests that there are three sorts of order working within any society. The first form of order is contained in:

> The fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. (p.xx)

The specific linguistic and cultural codes of any society inform and form the basic ideas and principles of order for all its citizens.

Another form of order is the deliberate scientific and philosophical explanations of the 'universal law' (p.xx) which order aspects of the physical world. However, according to Foucault, 'between the already "encoded" eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself' (p.xxi).

This intermediate zone is only revealed when the cultural codes are questioned:

> It is here that a culture, imperceptibly deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes, instituting an initial separation from them, causes them to lose their original transparency, relinquishes its immediate and invisible powers, frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones; this culture then finds itself faced with the stark fact that there exists, below the level of its spontaneous

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[80] Foucault, *Order of Things*, p.xviii.

> orders, things that are in themselves capable of being ordered, that belong to a certain unspoken order; the fact, in short, that order *exists*.[81]

Foucault claims that heterotopias do not destroy order. They reveal that although specific social orders are challenged the process exposes the possibility of other orders. The concept of order is freed from its traditional association with those specific discredited cultural codes.

The Postmodern attack on Enlightenment metanarratives has destroyed their justifying powers and this has created a heightened awareness of the constructed nature of orders and codes. This self-conscious awareness has itself become a form of justifying order, which new codes are rigorously judged against, and which undermines attempts to impose new versions of the old metanarratives. Order itself has not been denied, but has possibly been transformed into a more restless form.

CONSTRUCTED POSTMODERN ORDERS

Brian McHale agrees with Michel Foucault that Postmodern novels, such as *Poor Things* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, are heterotopias where 'discursive orders mingle promiscuously without gelling into any sort of overarching "super-order"' (*PF*, p.163). McHale seems to believe that carnival acts as an unconscious literary sub-structure rather than an ideological or philosophical super-order.

This dual theory can explain away the fragmented style as a return to an ancient response to the complexities of life, without compromising the heterogeneous contents of Postmodern work. This allows McHale to present Postmodern literature as both firmly unified and simultaneously disconnected and

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[81] Foucault, *Order of Things*, p.xx.

plural. The multiplicity of Postmodern literature seems to demand a more self-consciously Postmodern attitude to every aspect of the novels. McHale's vision of carnival and its relevance to Postmodern works have already been challenged, but his analysis of the discontinuity of Postmodern contents is more convincing.

Continuing from Foucault, McHale considers that Postmodern heterotopias:

> are fictions *about* the order of things, discourses which reflect upon the worlds of discourse. As such, they participate in that very general tendency in the intellectual life of our time toward viewing reality as *constructed* in and through our languages, discourses, and semiotic systems. (*PF*, p.164)

By dismantling the traditional order of society and of language itself these fictions highlight that orders are created linguistically, and that alternative orders can be created in their place. Only as language is deconstructed, is its importance in shaping and being shaped by society revealed.

Gray illustrates this idea in action. He deconstructs the traditional linear narrative and even the order of the words on the page by using text graphically to stress the physical, shaping presence of language. For instance, Chapter 12 of *1982, Janine*[82] is a tour de force of concrete prose, when the anti-hero, Jock McLeish, tries to commit suicide and experiences the 'ministry of many voices' (*J*, p.9). Throughout the chapter, but especially on p.184, the reader is forced physically to manipulate the book, turning it upside-down and side-ways in order to read different sections. The linear narrative shatters into many discontinuous fragments. Readers must wrestle with the book and the text to make some sense of the clamour of competing voices, and to choose their own order for the sections, before the relief of nearly four blank pages.

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[82] Alasdair Gray, *1982, Janine* (London: Cape, 1984). Reference hereafter to *J* in the text.

Language and culture are also shown to create order in *1982, Janine* when that order disintegrates. McLeish has allowed himself to be programmed by his employers' expectations and this situation is destroying him. Only when he can no longer force himself to live mechanically, without love, escaping into pornographic fantasy and alcohol, does he recognise that his life and opinions are based on fictions:

> For more than twenty-five years [...] I was a character in a script written by National Security. That script governed my main movements, and therefore my emotions [...] I made myself completely predictable so that the firm could predict me. I stopped growing, stopped changing. I helped the firm grow, instead of me. (*J*, p.333)

When McLeish can no longer maintain his rigid artificial order he almost dies but can then step out of his company's script. Since his life has been constructed out of a fiction, it is possible for him to reimagine himself and change. However, McLeish is also a character in a fiction by Alasdair Gray, the novel *1982, Janine*, which he cannot leave. His decision to step outside his firm's predictable script is part of Gray's Postmodern story. Yet the novel is unlike the company's script since it does not force McLeish to be predictable, and appears to leave him free at the end to write his own story.

Rushdie's novel *Shame* is also concerned with the role of language in constructing societies and personalities. The text constantly reminds readers that language is not a transparent and neutral means of conveying thoughts and experience but the tangible medium through which all experience and opinions are transformed by communication.

The Narrator carefully distinguishes between the country of Pakistan and the fictional country of the main story that resembles Pakistan:

> The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centring to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. (*S*, p.29)

By suggesting that this fictional country is not Pakistan the author makes an explicit connection between the fictional country and the real Pakistan, but also highlights that his representation is a mediated experience. This also implies that the 'real' Pakistan the Narrator discusses is separate from the raw experience of the country Pakistan.

Physical places, such as Pakistan, cannot be expressed directly in fiction, and real people, even authors, are also unable to be translated directly into fiction. The mediation of language is inevitable, and automatically creates a subjective, distorted, fictional version. There are, however, no other more realistic or authentic ways of communicating experience. The mediation of language therefore shapes society, as well as being constructed by society, and meaning only exists in language. However, language is not transcendent but the product of human traditions and social interaction. Language is the only means of expression but the only experience it expresses directly is the experience of that expression.

Shame emphasises the presence and competing strengths of different languages and cultures by means of the problem of translation. Several characters attack the use of the English language (p.28 and p.36) but are quoted in English, forcing readers to realise that they are reading about Urdu speakers in a rival language.

The Narrator also complains that English cannot convey the full Pakistani cultural meaning of the word 'shame':

> This word: shame. No, I must write it in its original form, not in the peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated

> detritus of its owners' unrepented past, this Angrezi in which I am forced to write, and so for ever alter what is written ...
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> *Sharam* [...] containing encyclopaedias of nuance [...] and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts. (*S*, pp.38-39)

The English language does not contain all the feelings and meanings contained in the Urdu word, and the history and attitudes of Imperial Britain demonstrate an alien concept of shame, one that seems close to shamelessness to the Narrator.

The Narrator makes the point that talking about shame in a language of a country which demonstrates no shame about its own shameful past ironically changes the meaning of the concept of shame. This Narrator implies that 'shame' is a poor word in the English language and a weak concept in British culture, whereas the Urdu word is rich with strong meanings from Pakistani and Muslim culture.

However, the Narrator points out that although languages and cultural attitudes cannot be translated exactly, this cannot stop cultures from communicating, connecting with and commenting on each other. There is no legitimate ground beyond or within language that can rule about the truth of one language over another. The Narrator will not allow the state supporters to use arguments about cultural relativism to undermine criticism of their inhumane behaviour (p.28). He also argues that 'It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion – and use, in evidence, the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyam – that something can also be gained' (p.29).

Edward Fitzgerald's nineteenth-century translation of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*[83] is very popular in the West. But it is 'really a complete reworking of

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[83] Omar Khayyám, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, trans. into verse by Edward Fitzgerald (New York: World, 1947), 4th edn. text (1879). Orig. (Persia, c.AD 1100).

[Khayyám's] verses, in many cases very different from the spirit (to say nothing of the content) of the original' (*S*, p.29). Rather than dismissing the translation as a case of Western imperial colonisation of Eastern writing, or as the result of ignorance, the Narrator asserts that Fitzgerald's translation is interesting in itself, bringing two cultures together and creating a new work. Postmodern fiction does not encourage insular attitudes but the self-conscious recognition of the enabling presence of language.

The effect of the Postmodern obsession with revealing the importance of languages in the construction of individuals and society is to create fictions that contrast many different forms of language and discourses. McHale claims, drawing on Bakhtin, that:

> The interweaving of different registers in the text of the novel produces the effect of *heteroglossia*, plurality of discourse; and it is this concrete heteroglossia which serves as the vehicle for the confrontation and dialogue among world-views and ideologies in the novel, its orchestrated *polyphony* of voices. (*PF*, p.166)

The confrontation of different forms of discourse, such as the Western Marxism of the Narrator of *Shame* and the Eastern philosophy of a Poet (*S*, pp.158-59), not only represents an argument between two men, but a clash between different generations, cultures and political visions.

The exploration of many different discourses emphasises that each contributes to the justification and creation of competing social structures, demonstrating that there is no way to establish a hierarchy or legitimacy between those discourses. The clash of cultures establishes that languages are limited and relative and can no longer legitimate universal metanarratives.

McHale argues that Postmodern literature uses heteroglossia 'as an opening wedge, as a means of breaking up the unified projected world into a polyphony of

worlds of discourse' (*PF*, p.167). He also suggests that the clash between cultures is orchestrated in order to disrupt literary conventions and create an image of the plural Postmodern world. Heteroglossia are certainly an effective literary device to convey the heterogeneous nature of the contemporary age, but cultural confrontations are more than a literary technique. The arguments themselves are important parts of Postmodern multiplicity after the loss of the certainty of metanarratives.

Novels do not concentrate on the confusion of discourses merely to illustrate the anxiety of Postmodern society, or as good examples of confusion. They do so because these arguments are sites where the destruction of certainty is clearly demonstrated and where new forms of order and legitimacy may be created out of the uncertainty. Eagleton highlights the importance of cultural clashes in contemporary society:

> It is bad news for [the] traditional concept of culture that the conflicts which have dominated the political agenda for the past couple of decades—ethnic, sexual, revolutionary nationalist—have been precisely ones in which questions of language, value, identity, and experience have been to the fore. For these political currents, culture is that which refuses or reinforces, celebrates or intimidates, defines or denies.[84]

McHale's analysis of heteroglossia, as the subversive 'historical roots' (*PF*, p.171) of the novel, is in danger of reducing the focus of the tension in Postmodern literature to an aesthetic idea or literary technique. Connor argues that McHale's analysis means that literature is either 'an unanalysed or unanalysable blank' or 'an elastic frame which expands obediently to contain every kind of

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[84] Terry Eagleton, *The Crisis of Contemporary Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp.8-9.

subversion'.[85] McHale rejects Connor's criticisms but finds that he 'can endorse'[86] the idea of the elasticity of the literary category.

Connor's criticism is aimed at McHale's general vision of literature as a 'regularly developing organism or genealogy'[87] which can happily accommodate even texts that aggressively deconstruct the notion of literature itself. McHale's literary concept relentlessly envelops every subversion and effectively neutralises them. However, Connor's point about literature in general also illustrates the specific case of Postmodern literature since he highlights the tendency for radical ideas to be glossed over in literary analysis.

As critics try to make sense of texts with heterogeneous features, they can simultaneously elide their most disturbing aspects. In McHale's case he describes Postmodern literature as new versions of ancient forms. Other critics can focus on the unifying commonality of discontinuities within and between many texts at the expense of the specific and powerful examples of fragmentation and difference. McHale himself has noted this tendency in Linda Hutcheon's examinations of Postmodern novels. 'What strikes one sooner or later is the *sameness* of many of these readings. Can all of these very diverse novels, one begins to wonder, really mean so nearly the same thing?'[88] The diversity of the texts is lost in a reading that generalises that diversity.

McHale suggests that the problem arises because Hutcheon is caught in a theoretical trap:

> The reason for this 'cookie-cutter' sameness of Hutcheon's interpretations is not far to seek. [...] Hutcheon tends to project her own anxiety of metanarratives onto the texts she reads, so that they all

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[85] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.131.
[86] McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, p.268.
[87] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.131.
[88] Brian McHale, 'Postmodernism, or The Anxiety of Master Narratives', *Diacritics*, 22:1 (Spring 1992), 17-33 (p.22).

> end up being about more or less the same thing, namely, about skepticism towards or refusal of master narratives.[89]

Theoretical language must now wrestle with the consequences of undermining metanarratives while still trying to impose meaningful patterns onto literature.

Hutcheon's desperate attempt to remain faithful to Postmodern theoretical scepticism transforms Postmodern literature into mirror images of that scepticism. These reading are not entirely inaccurate, because Postmodern literature is highly suspicious of any attempts to impose grand narratives. However, her readings do not do sufficient justice to the differences between and within Postmodern texts, and ignore these texts' attempts to consider the possibility of reconstruction by dwelling on the ubiquity of their deconstructive elements.

Fredric Jameson's Marxist metanarrative gives him a framework that enables him to avoid some of the paralysing contradictions that hamper many other theorists:

> I would like to characterize the postmodernist experience of form with what will seem, I hope, a paradoxical slogan: namely, the proposition that 'difference relates.' Our own recent criticism [...] has been concerned to stress the heterogeneity and profound discontinuities of the work of art, no longer unified or organic, but now a virtual grab bag or lumber room of disjoined subsystems and random raw materials and impulses of all kinds. The former work of art [...] has now turned out to be a text, whose reading proceeds by differentiation rather than by unification. Theories of difference, however, have tended to stress disjunction to the point at which the materials of the text, including its words and sentences, tend to fall apart into random and inert passivity, into a set of elements which entertain separations from one another.[90]

Theories of difference have argued themselves into a state of inactivity since they have no common ground to stress except their fragmentation. By focusing on the

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[89] McHale, 'Anxiety of Master Narratives', p.22.
[90] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.31.

disunity that unites these texts, theories of difference can neglect the specific role and meanings of that fragmentation in each separate novel.

In *Postmodernist Fiction* McHale reads Postmodern literature as an inquisitive movement. It raises questions about ontology, how to construct a literary world, and by inference how to construct the world of discourses that the texts and the readers inhabit. Questions about the nature of power and the ability to change a constructed, discursive world become lost, however, when McHale concentrates on constructing 'the repertory of motifs and devices, and the system of relations and differences' (*PF*; p.xi) that make up Postmodern literature. The bulk of his book catalogues as many of the formal techniques that Postmodern novels use to examine ontology as he can find. Consequently, Postmodern ideas seem to become stylistic features rather than providing new or useful ways of approaching and examining literature and the wider world of discourse.

McHale does try to give his reading greater significance in his last section. He concludes that Postmodern literature is useful because its 'foregrounded violations of ontological boundaries' (p.227) are models of both emotional relations and death. By interacting with Postmodern texts, readers are able to rehearse love and dying. McHale states that 'we no longer have anyone to teach us how to die well, or at least no one we can trust or take seriously' (p.232). He claims that readers have 'no hope of doing it [dying] over if we get it wrong the first time' (p.232). He uses the example of the cyclical structure of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*[91] to demonstrate that discourse does not end with the boundary of death, and that there is a 'dream of a return' (*PF*, p.235). This is an incredible claim for Postmodern literature.

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[91] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 3rd edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1964, (1939)).

It is arguable that *Finnegan s Wake* is a self-enclosed Modernist work, written as Modernism began to change but before Postmodern society developed, and is therefore not an example of Postmodern literature. But the thesis that Postmodern literature teaches readers how to live and die 'well' is also highly contentious. This argument is founded in McHale's version of the carnival foundations of Postmodernism. The cycle of the eternal renewal of life and death is a fundamental carnival duality, but this vision of human existence is not Postmodern, and cannot be argued as the primary motivation of Postmodern texts. Despite lingering hopes for the future, *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a lament for the specific lost myth of secularly acceptable pluralism and the end of an individual's life, not a celebration of a general abstraction.

There is also no reason why Postmodern literature, which specialises in liberating confusion and doubt, should become a trusted source of information. Authors have no experience of actually dying, and the texts constantly deconstruct all trust and authority. The concept of dying 'well' or of getting it wrong seems ludicrously outmoded, in the context of the mechanised and pointless mass deaths of both world wars and countless smaller conflicts.

Rushdie's novels frequently portray death as a meaningless and casual waste, and Gray's *A History Maker*[92] turns war into lethal game-shows played out by a bored society. McHale's analysis refuses to consider the serious implications of highlighting the construction of discourses in contemporary social, philosophical and political spheres, and tries instead to manipulate Postmodern texts into expressing a comforting new organic myth.

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[92] Alasdair Gray, *A History Maker* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994). References hereafter to *HM* in the text.

Hutcheon does argue for the political nature of Postmodern novels, interpreting them as focusing on marginalised places, people and ideas and undermining the centralised power that excludes these margins. However, she concludes that 'there is no dialectic in the postmodern'[93] and that this literature is essentially 'politically "unmarked"' (p.205). She therefore limits all Postmodern literature to illustrating the Postmodern moment and 'problematizing' (p.xi) or disturbing areas of contention. Her theory categorically removes the possibility of any form of political, social, philosophical or even aesthetic action, since 'Postmodernism has not theorized agency'.[94]

Hutcheon is deeply interested in feminism, a movement which does attempt to undermine established thought and social structures and to create new alternatives, but can only partially link it to Postmodernism. She reluctantly admits that while '"Feminism is a politics."[95] Postmodernism is not'.[96] However, I would argue that, although Postmodernism is not the political campaign that Feminism is, Postmodernism is deeply involved with political thinking.

Deconstruction is an anti-Establishment weapon that can be wielded from any political point of view, by always raising questions of power and manipulation. Since Hutcheon refuses to see Postmodern novels as demonstrating anything other than the evils of mastery and the refusal to master, she does not recognise any attempts to manipulate readers as acceptable political acts. However, many complicated Postmodern novels, such as *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Lanark*[97] and

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[93] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.x.
[94] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.168.
[95] Chris Weedon, 'Feminism and Theory', *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp.1-11 (p.1).
[96] Hutcheon, *Politics*, p.168.
[97] Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in 4 Books* (London: Paladin, 1987, (1981)). References hereafter to *L* in the text.

1982, Janine are deeply committed to persuading readers to agree with profoundly political ideas.

Jameson finds that Postmodern art forms have not been as limited as some of the theories that describe them:

> In the most interesting postmodernist works, however, one can detect a more positive conception of relationship, which restores its proper tension to the notion of difference itself. This new mode of relationship through difference may sometimes be an achieved new and original way of thinking and perceiving; more often it takes the form of an impossible imperative to achieve that new mutation in what can perhaps no longer be called consciousness.[98]

Postmodern works establish a difference that the viewer or reader cannot ignore.

Poor Things is diminished by being classified as just another example of the general Postmodern rejection of master narratives. The novel itself highlights many social issues and sets up uncomfortable and emotionally charged arguments about the historical truth of various versions of the story that cannot be settled. This demands that readers try to come to terms with its specific concerns and contradictions, without reducing their ambiguous significance.

Archie's version of Bella presents a vision of an attractive free spirit and the possibilities of feminism and socialism. But Victoria's angry rejection of this account brings Archie's story into sharp relief as a male fantasy. Victoria's cold materialism lessens the appeal of the feminism and Socialism that she advocates, and distracts attention from her achievements. The editor's notes then undermine Victoria's own successes and hopes.

The constant disruption of characters and expectations places great strains in the novel. Readers cannot relax into accepting any aspect of the text, since each aspect is contested. The overall effect is to throw every idea and character into

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[98] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.31.

question: is Bella a new role model or a male fantasy, or both? Is Victoria a great pioneer or a poor failure as a social campaigner, mother and woman? Does the unrealistic nature of Archie's tale render it invalid? Or is it metaphorical, implying a freedom of imagination? The text raises questions, without necessarily offering ultimate answers.

Although Victoria explicitly attacks Archie's section, and 'Gray' undermines Archie while attempting to support him, the story of Bella Baxter remains the largest section and a potent part of the novel. Sections contradict each other but they all bring different strengths to the novel and this forces readers to bear them all in mind while trying to negotiate a path through the contradictions.

Victoria and the editor provide social and political critiques of the Victorian and contemporary ages, but Archie provides the imaginative energy and possibility. Ultimately readers cannot reduce the contradiction without reducing the scope of the novel. The tension is also a vital part of the experience of *Poor Things* and the book would be quite altered by resolving this away.

The nuances of the novel include tempering hope with scepticism, philanthropic materialism with emotional fulfilment, and realism with imagination. In order to maintain the full emotional and philosophical scope of the novel, the readers must sacrifice hopes for a clear plot and come to terms with entertaining many irreducible and irreconcilable perceptions at the same time. It should not be inferred that the sections are clearly distinguished from each other on any level; their balancing of emotions and philosophies is not a neat, hierarchical or uncontested matter. Victoria does have great hope for reforms, although these are dashed, and Archie's narrative also contains social critiques.

Although each section contains a complicated mixture of ideas and emotions they do create distinct impressions that contribute different elements to the novel.

POSTMODERN DIFFERENTIATION

Jameson uses the installations of Nam June Paik, groups of televisions within plant displays or upon ceilings, as example of art that works through differentiation. The televisions play continuous sequences of images at random intervals from each other. According to Jameson, viewers approach these art-works in two different ways:

> The older aesthetic is then practiced by viewers, who, bewildered by the discontinuous variety, decided to concentrate on a single screen, as though the relatively worthless image sequence to be followed there had some organic value in its own right. The postmodernist viewer, however, is called upon to do the impossible, namely, to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference; such a viewer is asked to follow the evolutionary mutation of David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*[99] (who watches fifty-seven television screens simultaneously) and to rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called a relationship: something for which the word *collage* is still only a very feeble name.[100]

To experience these Postmodern installations viewers must attempt to see them in their entirety, although this is impossible. Traditional methods of reading art are defeated by the multiplicity of the experience. Like the readers of *Poor Things*, viewers deny themselves a Postmodern experience if they attempt to clarify their confusion by filtering out sections of the works.

Novels by Alasdair Gray and Salman Rushdie, as well as other Postmodern works, seem to demand readings that do justice to the extent of their heterogeneity. Their incredulity towards Enlightenment and literary

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[99] *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, dir. by Nicolas Roeg (UK: British Lion Film Corporation, 1976).
[100] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.31.

metanarratives should be recognised without ignoring each work's individual concerns and other aspects that contribute to their Postmodern experience. Postmodern art and literature start from the break down of traditional methods of seeing, reading and thinking but do more than just illustrate the Postmodern moment. They are not trivial decorations but participants in Postmodern society and its debates.

However, Jameson, as a Marxist, calls not only for new readings which encompass the depth of change but for a new art which is 'the political form of Postmodernism'.[101] This new art should go on from representing society to making some sense of its confusion and finding a contemporary purpose. This is Jameson's 'aesthetics of *cognitive mapping*' (p.51), providing a mental map of the Postmodern society and its relationship to its citizens. This would allow people to 'regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion' (p.54). Jameson believes that an accurate understanding of the world would enable people to change it.

Jameson does not believe that current Postmodern art achieves this. Accurate cognitive maps would need to create an 'as yet unimaginable new mode of representing' the society and 'world space of multinational capital' (p.54) to re-enfranchise citizens. He also distrusts examples of Postmodern art and literature that seem to celebrate aspects of society of which he disapproves.

Jameson questions the ethics of an artistic movement that objectifies the human body through 'fetishization' (p.34) and is excited by shallow images of social and technological decay in pictures of gleaming wrecked cars in cityscapes:

> How urban squalor can be a delight to the eyes when expressed in commodification, and how an unparalleled quantum leap in the

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[101] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.54.

> alienation of daily life in the city can now be experienced in the form of a strange new hallucinatory exhilaration—these are some of the questions that confront us.[102]

Jameson claims that cyberpunk, the science fiction sub-genre, is 'the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself' (n.1, p.419), since cyberpunk is obsessed with advanced technology, economics and conspiracy theories. It is 'in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions that [...] the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized' (p.38).

However, Jameson also claims that cyberpunk expresses the Postmodern 'sublime' (p.38) in collusion with the economic, social and technological forces that cyberpunk describes as in conspiracy:

> one has not grasped the spirit and the impulse of the imagination of the multinationals in postmodernism, which in new writing like cyberpunk determines an orgy of language and representation, an excess of representational consumption, if this heightened intensity is not grasped as sheer compensation, as a way of talking yourself into it and making, more than a virtue, a genuine pleasure and jouissance out of necessity, turning resignation into excitement and the baleful persistence of the past and its prose into a high and an addiction. (p.321)

Rather than fighting the malignancy of Postmodern society and multinational capitalism, Jameson sees literature such as cyberpunk exploiting and glamorising the situation. Cyberpunk acts like a drug, transforming the problems of contemporary society into dangerous entertainments and therefore preventing the contemplation of action.

Jameson does not explain, however, how cyberpunk, or any other form of literature, could fight capitalism. He suggests that now even explicitly adversarial art works 'are all somehow secretly disarmed and re-absorbed by a system of

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[102] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.33.

which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it'.[103] The loss of objective distance from multinational consumer society in the Postmodern era has disrupted every traditional attempt to judge elements of that society. Literature has to negotiate new methods of engagement, which may be contested and contradictory.

Jameson bases his analysis of political purpose on his Marxist agenda. Other examples of contemporary literature are still dealing with the Postmodern condition but also maintain a greater political and social involvement than cyberpunk novels. These novels may not be advocating the forms of direct action that Jameson demands, but they are, nevertheless, creating examples of Postmodern cognitive mapping, imagining detailed representations of Postmodern society and struggling to actively engage with that society.

There are few more political or even partisan novels than Gray's *Lanark*, where the technological and industrial complex is personified as the ruthless 'Creature' (*L*, p.371). In Rushdie's *Shame*, civil, religious and military dictatorships are heavily criticised. Doctorow's *Ragtime*[104] features the exploitation and struggles of American workers. And Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*[105] supports the now infamous national aspirations of the Serbian people. Yet all of these novels are described as Postmodern and are so complicated, contradictory and ambiguous that their political perspectives are not available as uncontested propaganda without doubt or answer.

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[103] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.49.
[104] E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (London: Picador, Pan, 1985, (1975)).
[105] Milorad Pavić, *Dictionary of the Khazars: A Lexicon Novel in 100,000 Words*, trans. by Christina Pribićević-Zorić, Female edn. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1989). Orig. pub. (Belgrade, Yugoslavia: Prosveta, 1985).

DICTIONARY OF THE KHAZARS

When *Dictionary of the Khazars* was published internationally most foreign commentators did not even realise that the warning to small nations to assert themselves was not just universal, or metaphoric, but also 'Serb-specific'.[106] Pavić was attempting to point the Serbians away from the fate of the Khazars, 'who lost their nationhood because they were unwilling to seize the prerogatives of empire' (p.23).

Pavić was a strong supporter of the war in Croatia, and the Serbian government's nationalist attempts to maintain the Serbian Empire of Yugoslavia. Western readers missed Pavić's specific political message because they did not fully understand the Yugoslavian situation. Also the novel's 'state-of-the-arts postmodernism' gave them the impression that the book was 'as internationalist in character as [...] *One Hundred Years of Solitude*' (pp.22-23).

However, Ken Kalfus suggests that *Dictionary of the Khazars* is not a limited tract. Pavić 'has no doubt about the humanity of his work, nor its universality',[107] since the novel started as a response to Tito's Communist regime, but Pavić felt that criticism of Tito was not enough. He broadened the book's scope 'to make a definition of the situation, to make a definition forever and anywhere' (p.22).

Although Pavić believes in Serbian nationalism rather than internationalism, Kalfus holds that Pavić's work 'is too eloquently multicultural in its celebration of other civilizations for him to be a bigot'.[108] Pavić's wide cultural, social and literary interests, and use of metafictional techniques result in his text not being

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[106] Ken Kalfus, 'Milorad Pavić: To Serbs with Love', *Village Voice, Literary Supplement*, 103, 10 March 1992, 22-23 (p.22).
[107] Milorad Pavić, in Ken Kalfus, 'Milorad Pavić: To Serbs with Love', *Village Voice, Literary Supplement*, 103, 10 March 1992, 22-23 (p.22).
[108] Kalfus, 'Milorad Pavić', p.23.

entirely xenophobic or closed minded, despite his nationalist views. It prevents his literature from degenerating into a political pamphlet or simplistic narrative.

It could be argued that *Dictionary of the Khazars* is not a Postmodern novel because its author believes in a repressive, nationalistic and anti-democratic ideology. However, the text does not strongly convey this ideology, which has only been revealed through other comments by the author. Italo Calvino reminds theorists that:

> we can no longer neglect the fact that books are made of words, of signs, of methods of construction. We can never forget that what books communicate often remains unknown even to the author himself, that books often say something different from what they set out to say, that in any book there is a part that is the author's and a part that is a collective and anonymous work.[109]

So, while Pavić's personal opinions provoked him to write *Dictionary of the Khazars*, the novel form is too complex for these opinions to dominate or negate other readings of the novel.

The text is written in the form of entries in a dictionary, which tells the story of the Khazars from three different religious perspectives. While it is possible to read the book one entry after another, readers are encouraged to create their own books by choosing personalised paths through the sections.[110] Each reading will be different since:

> each reader will put together the book for himself, [...] and, as with a mirror, he will get out of the dictionary as much as he puts into it, for [...] you cannot get more out of the truth than what you put into it. (p.13)

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[109] Italo Calvino, 'Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature', *The Literature Machine*, trans. by Patrick Creagh (London: Pan, Picador, 1989, (1982)), pp.89-100 (p.99). Book pub. (Torino, Italy: Giulio Einaudi, 1982). Orig. paper read in English at symposium on European politics, European Studies Program, Amherst College, 25 February 1976.
[110] Pavić, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, pp.11-14.

Here the book extends Calvino's argument that readers will unconsciously create their own books as they read, by demanding that they make an extra, conscious effort to construct unique readings of the dictionary.

Dictionary of the Khazars also concerns itself with many literary, historical and social issues that are not solely connected with the immediate Serbian situation, and it is a highly ambiguous document. One Khazar character reports the Devil's claim that 'your democracy sucks'[111] because it allows minorities to terrorise majorities. This sentiment is strongly echoed in Pavić's text, but the crude language is toned down in the English translation.[112] However, the claim, is immediately dismissed by other characters as 'implausible'.[113]

The novel ends not with a call to arms or political action but with an attempt to manipulate female and male readers into meeting to compare their incomplete books and to fall in love. Indeed, the scope and imagination of the novel make it difficult to read it as anything other than an expression of Postmodernism. McHale includes *Dictionary of the Khazars* as an example of Postmodern, low-tech, conspiracy literature. He feels that such texts 'seem to function in the postmodernist context much as the high-tech variants do, as more or less distantly displaced "figurations" of the contemporary world-system'.[114] McHale argues that this novel's complex vision of the world produces a cognitive map as accurate as that of any cyberpunk novel.

Pavić's text deals with a confused society facing a great crisis of identity and justification and the pressures of strong economic, political and social upheavals. Pavić's anti-democratic Serbian nationalism grows out of his reaction to the

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[111] Pavić, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, p.330.
[112] Kalfus, 'Milorad Pavić', p.23.
[113] Pavić, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, p.330.
[114] McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, p.180.

dogmatic brutality of the Eastern European Communist establishment, historical injustices and atrocities against the Serbs. These include massacres conducted through the agency of the former Nazi puppet-state of Croatia. He also reacts against what he sees as the hypocrisy and weakness of Western liberal democracies. Yet his literary attempts to represent this complicated situation and create possible new approaches to it are Postmodern.

While Western critics argue that Pavić's politics are conservative because he is anti-democratic, his literature is not conservative. His criticism of Western liberal humanism is an unusual but powerful example of the Postmodern disillusionment with all metanarratives. Pavić is a right-wing Postmodernist and *Dictionary of the Khazars* demonstrates that Postmodern literature is suited to exploring radical ideas from every political point of view.

Rushdie believes that 'the novel has always been *about* the way in which different languages, values and narratives quarrel, and about the shifting relations between them, which are relations of power' (*IH*, p.420). Postmodern literature emphasises the arguments that have always played a major role in literature. Texts cease to resolve arguments artificially, in an attempt to examine those conflicting discourses and their power struggles. Rather than claiming any great prophetic role for fiction, Rushdie describes contemporary literature as needing 'no special rights *except to be the stage upon which the great debates of society can be conducted*' (p.420). In other words, 'the privilege of being the arena of discourse, the place where the struggle of languages can be acted out' (p.427).

Literature no longer sets itself up above and apart from society to try to escape or to solve all of the moral, spiritual and political problems of the age. Eagleton describes this as a result of culture losing its perceived distance from society:

> What has happened is that culture is less and less able to fulfil its classical role of reconciliation. [...] For culture is now palpably part of the problem rather than the solution; it is the very medium in which battle is engaged, rather than some Olympian terrain on which our differences can be recomposed.[115]

Literature can never escape from its own society and therefore it now becomes a participant in the great debates of Postmodernism, taking 'the "privileged arena"[116] of conflicting discourses *right inside our heads*' (*IH*, p.426). Rushdie also emphasises the importance of the partnership between readers and writers in creating the experience of the texts.

SADO-MASOCHISTIC PORNOGRAPHY IN *1982, JANINE*

The debates within Postmodern fiction are not only esoteric, but can be of the most emotionally charged nature. We have lost our justifications and certainties, but not our need for values. So the inclusion of genres such as pornography in mainstream literature throws residual values, consensus, paradoxical and ambiguous opinions within society into sharp relief and demands that readers face their own values. Extreme varieties of pornography, such as sadism, make these disputed areas even clearer and even harder to resolve. S.J. Boyd argues that 'pornography can be regarded as a kind of documentary which reveals truths about ourselves which have generally been kept hidden'.[117]

The first half of Gray's *1982, Janine* uses a considerable amount of violent sado-masochistic pornography as Jock's fantasies, to produce powerful emotional responses in the reader. Jock's dreams of enslaving women are an important

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[115] Eagleton, *Crisis of Contemporary Culture*, p.8.
[116] Carlos Fuentes, 'Words Apart', *Guardian, Review*, Friday 24 February 1989, pp.29-30 (p.29).
[117] S.J. Boyd, 'Black Arts: *1982, Janine* and *Something Leather*', in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, ed. by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp.108-123 (p.110).

psychological device to distract himself from his own willing enslavement to his own job and the cynical Establishment. These dreams are also interwoven with discourses about Scottish politics, and form a metaphorical picture of Scotland, and her people's, parallel exploitation by their own employers, absentee landlords and neighbours. Jock's love of nightmarish, violent pornography is a symptom of his warped and stunted emotional life. His fantasies change when he finally allows his emotions to break free.

These fantasies provided important parts of the fabric of *1982, Janine*, but they are highly unpleasant to read and uncomfortable to interpret. Boyd points out that one of the major problems with coping with the pornography in *1982, Janine*, is that:

> Jock is not simply [...] an enthusiast for the erotic. He is a consumer of the second-worst kind of pornography [...] that which proffers images of violence against women and rapacity for titillation, and is himself a creator of some very nasty pornographic fantasies.[118]

Christopher Whyte suggests that '*1982, Janine* provokes silence', because 'the construction of sexual fantasies is narrative art at its lowest common denominator, its most universally human, but is something that few literary critics are prepared (or equipped) to discuss'.[119]

However, this novel has actually provoked considerable debate between critics and readers about how to receive the pornography, and whether its inclusion is justified. These arguments demonstrate the extent to which some values are still held in common, but there is less agreement as to how best to support them. The debate also shows that as literature has become increasingly frank, the

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[118] Boyd, 'Black Arts', p.110.
[119] Christopher Whyte, 'Alasdair Gray: Not a Mirror But a Portrait', *Books in Scotland*, 28 (Summer 1988), 1-2 (p.1).

relationships between 'high' and 'low' art, academia, society, morality and pornography have become increasingly confused.

Douglas Gifford finds that the pornography in *1982, Janine*:

> is sleazy stuff, deliberately calculated to disturb and embarrass. I defend its presentation to the hilt, since any reader who doesn't recognise the cliched, parodic, Hollywood and Penthouse derivation of these unreal lovelies is missing the entire point. They are finally meant to disgust, to shame us; we have all helped spawn these stereotypes of male domination over hapless or compliant ladies of utter unreality.[120]

Gifford interprets the fantasies as deliberately repulsive, and calculated to provoke a guilty response in its readers.

This argument presupposes that those readers are men, that they all have these shameful fantasies, and that the novel is trying to confront men and warn women. This seems an incredibly limited vision of the text. The novel also seems to accuse women of complicity in their own victimisation, and uses the pornography politically, to dramatise much broader forms of exploitation in society.

Anthony Burgess finds the use of this fantasy far more ambiguous than Gifford, precisely because of its inclusion in Postmodern fiction. Burgess feels confronted with 'the fabrication of shameful scenes which, brought up as we are on the pre-Borgesian contract, we have to accept as a mode of imagined reality and, accepting, reject'.[121] Burgess feels that since:

> Gray is a good novelist [...] what he tells us we have to believe. Believing, we are then told not to believe: this is only one sad man's fantasy [...] and it is assumed that it has no power to affect the reader. (p.400)

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[120] Douglas Gifford, 'Private Confessions and Public Satire in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray', *Chapman*, 50-51, 10:1 & 2 (Summer 1987), 101-116 (p.114).
[121] Anthony Burgess, 'New from Scotland', *Homage to Qwert Yuiop* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1986), pp.398-401 (p.400).

Traditionally, Burgess might have added, readers were required to read fantasies and dreams on a different ontological level from the rest of the novel.

Despite the convention that fantasies within novels are distanced from the readers, Burgess cannot separate himself from the emotional impact of this pornography:

> Perhaps I am taking this business too seriously. [...] I cannot help, nevertheless, holding to the view that things described by the imagination have the sort of validity a newsreel gives us. Thus Gray's novel disturbs me. If he wants his readers to be so disturbed – glandularly, not intellectually, and I think he does – I feel like becoming dourly Scottish and thundering about human responsibility. Transpose the whole construct to a level of adolescent play, and it becomes more venial. But it is hard to wade through 345 pages of juvenile fantasy, however mature the technique, without feeling affronted.[122]

In short, Burgess resents having to read this perverse sort of pornography. He does not know to what ends it is being used or which critical values are appropriate to employ for a critique of its use in the Postmodern era. By uncomfortably combining sexual relationships and violence, both fundamental elements of society, in fantasy, the text deliberately reduces the emotional distance between itself and the reader.

1982, Janine makes different demands on its male and female readers. Gray acknowledges that 'a few women have found *Janine* very hard to take, which I can understand. I have suggested that if they were to read Chapter 12 first – and then go back to the start...',[123] the implication of his unfinished sentence being that they might accept the pornography and persevere with the narrative. If disturbed readers follow Gray's advice, he seems to suggest that they will gain a

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[122] Burgess, 'New from Scotland', p.400.
[123] Alasdair Gray, in Sean Figgis and Andrew McAllister, 'Alasdair Gray', interview, *Bête Noire*, 5 (1988), 17-44 (19).

sympathetic understanding of how Jock reached this low point, and see his attempt to redeem himself. Otherwise, they could abandon the novel halfway through, disgusted by the fantasies, believing Jock to be beyond redemption.

Kathy Acker and Liz Lochhead both feels that the use of this pornography is justified as part of a rigorous artistic examination of society, and so do not condemn it, or Gray, out-of-hand as misogynistic. Lochhead comments that:

> in *1982, Janine* it's very, very difficult to take the pornography, but if you keep with it you realise it's pornography being dealt with, and explained, and shown to be the product of a really [...] incredibly screwed-up way that people live. It doesn't mean that Alasdair was completely outside of it, and it was very brave and perhaps foolhardy of him to have written so [...] nakedly about those kinds of things.[124]

Marshall Walker describes *1982, Janine* as 'anti-pornographic',[125] but this is not necessarily the case. Gray admits that he 'quite enjoyed writing the sadistic nasty bits [...] and well I cannot say, [...] "I happened to write this for purely sociological reasons." I rather enjoyed it for its own sake'.[126] However, Gray also comments that 'when I was writing these pornographic fantasies I was also criticising them, and thinking why is it going on like this?' (p.24). Gray argues that 'the book isn't a straight pornographic read. [...] The point is that the fantasies are continually interrupted by realities from the past, by things he doesn't want to remember, but can't help not'.[127] Whatever Gray's own sexual inclinations are, the artistic and political considerations of the novel undermine the pornography here.

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[124] Liz Lochhead, in 'Late Show Special: Alasdair Gray', *The Late Show*, BBC 2, October 1993.
[125] Marshall Walker, 'The Process of Jock McLeish and the Fiction of Alasdair Gray', in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, ed. by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp.37-47 (p.38).
[126] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.19.
[127] Gray, in 'Late Show Special: Alasdair Gray', *The Late Show*, BBC 2, October 1993.

Boyd finally demands that 'Jock's fantasy world must not be seen in a *wholly* negative way. It expresses a Dionysian energy and creativity which Scotland is seen to lack'.[128] Gray reveals that his fantasies stem from seeing American comics at the age of 10. British boys' comics had no women in them, but American comics had

> jungle girls and super women who were dodging about in all kinds of exciting circumstances wearing differently decorated forms of bikinis. [...] In these comics sexual love was never presented, its space was taken by capture and bondage and, therefore, as an early adolescent who was very timid [...] I found it easier to imagine capturing and tying up a women than having sexual intercourse with her.[129]

In *1982, Janine*, Jock sets many of his fantasies in America, because 'seen from Selkirk America is a land of endless pornographic possibility' (*J*, p.35). America fills his mind with film images and dreams. It has a much more confident culture than Scotland. When Jock 'was too nervous to speak to anyone' at a singles club, one of his creations, Superb is more confident, because she 'is in America rich and free' (*J*, p.35).

Jock doubts that Scottish women can be direct and open because he claims 'we are all timid and frigid here' (p.35). He does acknowledge that Scots can be courageous and confident, but 'the parents and educators of this damned country teach cowardice, herding us toward the safest cages' (p.35). Jock's fantasies can be read as challenges to, as well as symptoms of, his life-long conditioning. This may be why, even after Jock has become a changed man, he does not entirely abandon his fantasies.

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[128] Boyd, 'Black Arts', p.116.
[129] Alasdair Gray, in Pat Kane, 'Interview with Alasdair Gray', *The Usual Suspects*, BBC Radio Scotland, 4 January 1994.'

1982, Janine raised many questions about the use of 'glandularly' as well as 'intellectually' disturbing material.[130] The reception of the material depends heavily upon the artistic and moral values and specific perspective of each reader, their uncertainties and confusions, and how they perceive and negotiate the contradictions created in the novel. Each critic read *1982, Janine* as a personal challenge, and created readings, both for and against the novel, which defended their own sets of values.

Boyd suggests that *1982, Janine* 'uses pornography as a means of researching the truth about Jock, however unpalatable'[131] but this revelation extends beyond Jock towards the readers. The reception of controversial material is almost as revealing as its creation. The novel uses pornography to create a Postmodern debate which forces readers to examine their attitudes to sexual politics, sex, violence, literature, entertainment, morals, censorship, freedom, glamour, Scotland and their own identities and natures.

CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES: *SOMETHING LEATHER*

Something Leather[132] throws the concerns raised by *1982, Janine* into even greater contrast, because, unlike *1982, Janine*, it did not enjoy the same generally positive critical reaction. The novel consists of pornographic chapters set in the present, framing episodes from the history of the characters. Boyd is highly critical of these middle chapters, since they are generally 'sad stuff, a shameless rehash of sorry kitchen-sink dramas penned years back by Gray. Indeed, an appropriate sub-title for the whole book might be "Cauld Kail on Heat!"'.[133]

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[130] Burgess, 'New from Scotland', p.400.
[131] Boyd, 'Black Arts', p.110.
[132] Alasdair Gray, *Something Leather* (London: Cape, 1990).
[133] Boyd, 'Black Arts', p.120.

In *1982, Janine* rape-fantasies are symptoms of Jock's own bondage, but in *Something Leather* sado-masochistic pornographies are not presented as fantasies, political metaphors and nightmares, but real and positive freedoms. This is a quite different moral use of pornography than in the earlier book. Lesbians rape June for her own good, but she shakes off her trauma almost instantly. She has been changed and made to feel desire at last: 'for the effect of the rape has been, albeit belatedly, to awaken the Dionysian in June'.[134]

The fantasies that were blinding and killing Jock in *1982, Janine* involved corrupting people to co-operate willingly in their own exploitation. They are subverted by political analysis and ultimately defeated by Jock's reclamation of his personal history. But in *Something Leather*, the entire book is a fantasy about corrupting people to co-operate willingly in their own exploitation. What politics the book deals with are very limited and kept away from the pornography. There is no sense that the pornography is being criticised, or means anything more than an unconvincing liberation.

Where critics felt challenged by the pornography in *1982, Janine*, they felt cheated by the pornography, and the structure, of *Something Leather*. Again they had put up with unpleasant images and an unconventional format, but this time there was no convincing reason for either. Boyd condemns the book, not only for its overly disjointed form, and for irrelevant sections, but also because:

> the suggestion [...] that forcibly chaining, beating, indecently assaulting, depilating and tattooing a woman might be *doing her a favour* is surely outrageous and dangerous. Publishing detailed pornographic fantasies which carry this suggestion is perhaps wicked in the strong sense.[135]

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[134] Boyd, 'Black Arts', p.121.
[135] Ibid., p.122.

John Kenny Crane also feels that:

> I could handle [the pornography] if the author were guiding it all toward some thematic point. But Mr. Gray seems to me to have no place to go with it. It is gratuitous, the outpouring of his imagination without the form of art to shape and control it.[136]

Many critics feel that the pornography in *Something Leather* is unacceptable because it is not deployed with sufficient artistic care, nor works towards an acceptable moral end or the provocation of debate. The pornography in *1982, Janine* is considerably more unpleasant, aggressive and pervasive. But its use is generally considered far more acceptable because of the way it is integrated into and subverted by that powerful novel.

Gifford wonders whether there is a Postmodern justification for recycling disparate material and old plays in *Something Leather*: 'is it a trick? Is it necessarily invalid?'.[137] Gifford argues that it is valid to use old material, but here the stories seem to be 'pulled in by the hair of the head' (p.16). The middle section seems such a meaningless mess that Gifford believes this must be a deliberate strategy 'to rebel against the "right" artful way of doing things. [...] Otherwise I can't see why Gray didn't realise the irrelevance of much of these stories to the four women' (p.16).

In the Postmodern era, with novels using a variety of experimental techniques, and discussing a large range of subjects, it is increasingly unclear which literary ideas to judge them by. Can *Something Leather* be criticised for having a disjointed structure if it is deliberately creating this in an attempt to subvert traditional conventions of literary coherence and the linear plot? Even if the

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[136] John Kenny Crane, 'Hairless in Glasgow', *New York Times, Book Review*, 4 August 1991, p.15.
[137] Douglas Gifford, 'Recent Scottish Fiction: Killing the Dreams of Tradition and Modernity', *Books in Scotland*, 34 (Spring 1990), 10-18 (p.15).

structure was designed to subvert the traditional plot, it is still possible to criticise it for failing to take sufficient care to convince readers of its validity or contents.

The debate about *Something Leather* highlights the link between artistic and moral values. There is a tendency for critics to uphold or condemn both the artistic and moral content of novels. The novelist James Kelman makes a passionate case that critics and readers cannot, and should not divorce artistic and moral values while analysing literature. He argues that 'a good writer is not necessarily a good artist',[138] from an assumption that 'the process of art is an aid to the purification of society' (p.13).

Kelman describes the history of painting as artists moving from presenting general types, then individuals to focusing on marginalised people. He claims that this has been mirrored by developments in Western society where more people have gained rights. He argues that society moves because artists, among others, highlight those stereotypes and clichéd images which objectify women, black people, the working-class and others as 'never fully-formed human beings' (p.13). But while social attitudes have changed it is not at all obvious that writing, or painting, has been following this clear path from representing types to individuals.

Kelman notes that the definition of 'good' writing often relates only to a writer's technical use of language. But technique was 'certainly not what good art was about' (p.8). He claims that 'many writers who are described as "good" aren't that good at all', because 'instead of thinking and judging for themselves they're relying on conventional wisdom, received opinion; the everyday values of society' (pp.8-9).

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[138] James Kelman, 'Artists and Values', *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992), pp.5-15 (p.7). Orig. talk to MA students, Glasgow School of Art, late 1989 or early 1990.

Kelman suggests that Rushdie relies too heavily 'on the "technique" of stereotype' in *The Satanic Verses*, and 'much of the novel fails as a result'.[139] Kelman argues that 'by definition' stereotyping 'offers a simplistic view of people and situations that is always conventional, a recipe for lazy writing. At worst it becomes prejudicial and serves only to reinforce the marginalisation of distinct social groupings' (pp.18-19).

Kelman asks:

> How do we tell if an artist has value? We don't. [...] We can tell if a *person* has value. And that value is moral if we want it to be moral. Or monetary, if we want it to be monetary. We can tell if a person's work has value. [...] And if we are involved in an art medium then we evaluate this work on its own terms and these terms are aesthetic.[140]

Kelman claims that he is making aesthetic judgements but his criticism is political and based squarely on his personal moral code.

Rushdie, however, seems to disagree: 'literature is self-validating. That is to say, a book is not justified by its author's worthiness to write it, but by the quality of what has been written' (*IH*, p.14). He is reluctant to make the same simplistic link between authors' personalities or unpalatable ideologies and their writing. Other authors also argue that it is possible to separate moral and aesthetic judgements.

Carter considers that 'it is impossible for any English writer in this century to evade the great fact of D.H. Lawrence, but taking him seriously as a novelist is one thing, and taking him seriously as a moralist is quite another'.[141] Doctorow also maintains that in the 1930s: 'the right causes got mixed up with the wrong

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[139] James Kelman, 'English Literature and the Small Coterie', *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992), pp.16-26 (p.18). Orig. pub. *Glasgow Herald* and since revised.
[140] Kelman, 'Artists and Values', p.12.
[141] Angela Carter, 'Lorenz as Closet-Queen', *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (London: Virago Press, 1982), pp.161-68 (p.161). Orig. pub. *New Society*, 1975.

people, ideals gave way to expediency, and hateful writers did good work and noble writers did lousy work'.[142] These authors seem unhappy with the idea that good literature can be morally repugnant, or ethically out-of-date. But, unlike Kelman, they find that they cannot abandon the idea.

Something Leather, and other controversial texts, stimulate debates about values by forcing their readers' to examine their values, reassess their opinions, and order their priorities when those values conflict. These fictions may or many not be artistically, or morally valuable in themselves. But the discussions they provoke are both artistically and morally valuable, since they express many Postmodern uncertainties, and demonstrate the different values that are currently competing for prominence within society.

THE SATANIC VERSES AND THE POLITICS OF UNCERTAINTY

Gray's *Something Leather* generates debates that reveal the areas of conflict within liberal, western democracies, showing the conflicts between their ideals of equality and freedom. But Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* reveals the arguments between and within western society and various Muslim cultures. A furious row has erupted over this novel, asking readers many uncomfortably urgent questions about the nature and values of multicultural, western society, about other cultures and about the relationships between cultures. The row was also an unwelcome reminder that reality is vastly complicated and that not every problem has a neat solution.

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[142] E.L. Doctorow, 'The Beliefs of Writers', *Poets and Presidents: Selected Essays, 1977 – 1992* (London: Macmillan, 1994, (1993)), pp.105-16 (p.109). Orig. pub. *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 1985.

The Satanic Verses is at the centre of a huge international storm. Part of its huge narrative fictionalises the life of Muhammad, the writing of the Koran and the beginnings of the Islamic religion as the dreams of a disturbed man. These fictionalised chapters, and the author, have been condemned by many Muslims as blasphemous, despite Rushdie not being a practising Muslim.

As is well known, Ayatollah Khomeini, the late spiritual leader and President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, issued a religious edict, or Fatwa, on the 14 February 1989, which stated:

> I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of *The Satanic Verses* book which is against Islam, the Prophet and the Koran, and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death.[143]

Rushdie has had to go into hiding under police protection, bookshops have been firebombed, and publishers, translators and moderate Islamic clerics have been attacked and even killed.

The outrage of many Muslims over the book has been used as a political tool in many countries, in many different power struggles. In Britain, agitation against the book was used to consolidate the power-base of various Muslim clerics over their secular rivals. But demonstrations against the book were then used as an excuse for racist action against the entire British Muslim community. In Iran, where the book was never published, the Fatwa was a political tool against western societies and thought. It was an effort to unite the country behind its religious leaders in difficult economic circumstances after the end of the seven-year war with Iraq.

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[143] Ayatollah Khomeini, *Fatwa*, in 'Rushdie in Hiding After Ayatollah's Death Order', *Guardian*, Wednesday 15 February 1989, p.1. Orig. delivered on Tehran Radio, Iran, Tuesday 14 February 1989.

Various descriptions of the novel have been used to stir up the passions of many groups, and these have almost swamped the actual book. Even in 1989, the critic Homi Bhabha recognised that:

> The complex vision of *Satanic Verses* is fast losing its reality. Both literature and humanity are being reduced to empty symbols; symbols that at the same time are the pris[on]ers of a Western liberal conscience and hostages to an Islamic fundamentalist orthodoxy.[144]

The book became an affair, a provocation of offence, and a totem for many sides. It was distorted and reinterpreted, reported and often unread. Eventually Rushdie felt compelled to point out that 'at the centre of the storm stands a novel, a work of fiction, one that aspires to the condition of literature. [...] It felt impossible, amid such a hubbub, to insist on the fictionality of fiction' (*IH*, p.393).

Novels are full of ambiguities and dramatic situations, and they 'attempt radical reformulations of language, form and ideas [...] to see the world anew' (p.393). Characters act on many sides of many debates, and they do not all voice the opinions of the author. Rushdie has been criticised because in one scene the Faithful are called 'bum' and 'scum' (*SV*, p.101), but these are the insults hurled by their enemies, not the author. Rushdie asks 'how, one wonders, could a book portray persecution without allowing the persecutors to be seen persecuting?' (*IH*, p.401).

All of the dream sequences, including those fictionalising the foundation of Islam, are punishments of Gibreel Farishta. Gibreel is an Indian movie star who has suddenly lost his faith, and instead dreams about religion. Rushdie argues that the 'first purpose of these sequences is not to vilify or "disprove" Islam, but to portray a soul in crisis, to show how the loss of God can destroy a man's life' (*IH*,

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[144] Homi Bhabba, 'Beyond Fundamentalism and Liberalism', *New Statesman & Society*, 2:39, 3 March 1989, 34-35 (p.34).

p.399). He uses Islam to represent a general argument about belief because he knows most about this tradition, not because he wanted to attack it above other religions.

Rushdie also asks 'how could a book portray doubt without allowing the uncertain to articulate their uncertainties?' (*IH*, p.401). In the dream sequences Gibreel appears as the angel Gabriel to Muhammad, or Mahound, telling him to recite the Koran. But in the dreams the force of Mahound's faith and character forces revelation from Gibreel. Gibreel hears himself speak, but does not know whose voice it is or where the revelations come from. Gibreel feels that:

> Being God's postman is no fun, yaar.
> Butbutbut: God isn't in this picture.
> God knows whose postman I've been. (*SV*, p.112)

Some of the revelations that flow through Gibreel include the legendary 'Satanic Verses'. The deities Al-Lāt, Al-'Uzzā, and Manāt, among other goddesses, were worshipped as the daughters of Allāh at the Ka'bah in Mecca before Muhammad recited the Koran.[145] The legend of the 'Satanic Verses' suggested that Muhammad recited verses that proclaimed these three Goddesses were divine. But then he denounced these verses as the work of the devil, and recanted.

Chapter 53 of the Koran, 'The Star', specifically rejects the divinity of these goddesses:

> Have you thought on Al-Lāt and Al-'Uzzā, and thirdly, on Manāt, the other? Are you to have the sons, and He the daughters? This is indeed an unfair distinction!

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[145] N.J. Dawood, 'Introduction', in *The Koran*, 5th rev. edn. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990), pp.1-4 (p.1).

> They are but names which you and your fathers have invented: God has vested no authority in them.[146]

The Koran dismisses all earlier gods and goddesses as human constructs. This passage can be read as a straightforward denial of the divinity of popular, pagan idols, but it can also be interpreted, in the context of the novel, as the recantation of the legendary 'Satànic Verses'.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the declaration of these verses weakens the new religion and its followers in the eyes of their enemies. Recantation wins back their strength although it leads to the persecution of the faithful. Gibreel knows that both sets of verses came through him, and is distressed because he does not know if God or the devil was involved in either version. Rushdie claims that the legend of the 'Satanic Verses' is well known in Islam. This novel makes the legend known to a wider audience and uses it as a method of questioning the certainty of faith and the nature of religious revelations.

Rushdie argues that the use of dreams was a deliberate attempt to save the novel from accusations of distorting history and religion:

> the point is not whether the satanic verses incident 'really' happened; the point is to examine what such an incident might reveal about what revelation is, about the extent to which the mystic's conscious personality informs and interacts with the mystical event; the point is to try and understand the human event of revelation. The use of fiction was a way of creating the sort of distance from actuality that I felt would prevent offence from being taken. I was wrong. (*IH*, pp.408-09)

Naïvely, Rushdie hoped that by making his treatment of Islam fantastic and putting it in the specific context of someone's dreams no one would take it as disrespectful.

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[146] 'The Star', *The Koran*, trans. by N.J. Dawood, 5th rev. edn. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990, (1956)), pp.371-73 (p.372). Orig. (Saudi Arabia, c.AD 610-632).

However, although the sections about Islam are only Gibreel's dreams, it is virtually impossible to treat them as emotionally distinct from the rest of the novel. When discussing the fantasies in *1982, Janine*, Burgess argues that he 'cannot help, nevertheless, holding to the view that things described by the imagination have the sort of validity a newsreel gives us'.[147] This is equally true here. It is because they appear in a novel, as part of its wider structure, that the dreams in *The Satanic Verses* have an emotional impact on the readers as well as the dreamer.

Rushdie admits that it would be 'disingenuous' to pretend that the novel did not also use the dreams 'to make other points' (*IH*, p.399). These included the political point about Islam's patriarchal 'attitude to women', since one of the reasons that the Goddesses were rejected was that they were female. These points are not central to Gibreel's crisis, but are also present. Those who have been offended by the portrayal of their religion in the novel are not necessarily unsophisticated readers. They recognise that *The Satanic Verses* represents a serious challenge to the certainty of specific views that they hold.

Rushdie hopes that eventually people, including Muslims, will recognise that:

> the row over *The Satanic Verses* was at bottom an argument about who should have power over the grand narrative, the Story of Islam, and that that power must belong equally to everyone. That even if my novel were incompetent, its attempt to retell the Story would still be important. That if I've failed, others must succeed, because those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts.[148]

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[147] Burgess, 'New from Scotland', p.400.

[148] Salman Rushdie, 'One Thousand Days in a Balloon', *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, rev. edn (London: Granta, 1992), pp.430-39 (p.432). Orig. pub. as 'One Man in a Doomed Balloon', *Guardian*, Friday 13 December 1991, p.19, and since revised.

While pious Muslim people are genuinely distressed by suggestions that *The Satanic Verses* portrays Muhammad blasphemously, the campaign against the novel has been led by the clerics who now control Islam. Religion is a potent force, and the control of its grand narratives gives immense political power.

The Satanic Verses enters this political situation to challenge those who use religious certainty as a weapon. Instead of certainty, the novel creates ambiguities, by mixing many genres and cultural ideas, including Islamic history and Postmodern scepticism. Rushdie notes that:

> Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world.* [...] I have tried to embrace it. (*IH*, p.394)

In short, *The Satanic Verses* takes a political stance, which challenges those who defend the purity of cultures.

This novel opposes certainty and purity because 'through-out human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings' (*IH*, p.394). Blind certainty leads to repression but also to stagnation, because 'human beings understand themselves and shape their futures by arguing and challenging and questioning and saying the unsayable; not by bowing the knee, whether to gods or to men' (pp.394-95). *The Satanic Verses* is an attempt to generate new answers from old ideas in the present multicultural age.

Furthermore, Rushdie's novel is full of uncertainty and ambiguity but this does not mean that the novel refuses to make a case or draw some conclusions about the state of the world. Rushdie himself reasonably asserts that:

> *The Satanic Verses* is, I profoundly hope, a work of radical dissent and questioning and reimagining. It is not, however, the book it has been made out to be, that book containing 'nothing but filth and insults and abuse' that has brought people out on to the streets across the world.
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> That book simply does not exist. (*IH*, p.395)

Because the debates that *The Satanic Verses* raises are firmly political, dealing with issues of power, one of the methods often used to attack it is to suggest that it is motivated by greed not philosophy.

Many of the opponents of the book describe it as technically bad and unethical art. Some Muslims and Westerners have accused Rushdie of abusing Islam simply to gain notoriety and thus sell more books. Roald Dahl, the British children's author, describes Rushdie as 'a dangerous opportunist'.[149] Dahl claims that Rushdie 'knew exactly what he was doing' because he grew up in a Muslim family and therefore must have caused the row deliberately. Dahl also argues that 'this kind of sensationalism does indeed get an indifferent book on to the top of the bestseller list, [...] but to my mind it is a cheap way of doing it' (p.15).

Rushdie has been attacked by many westerners, including fellow writers Dahl and John Lé Carre; Conservative Government Ministers, especially Norman Tebbit; Dr Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury; and many journalists. But many Muslim writers and intellectuals have defended Rushdie.[150] Western anger with Rushdie only becomes understandable once readers acknowledge that

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[149] Roald Dahl, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, Tuesday 28 February 1989, p.15.
[150] *For Rushdie: Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defence of Free Speech*, ed. by Anouar Abdallah (New York: Braziller, 1994); and 'A Declaration of Iranian Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Salman Rushdie', *New Yorker*, 14 May 1992, 31.

The Satanic Verses is a political, rather than regional, attack on certain forms of absolutist, conservative ideologies, including both western and eastern religious ideologies. When Dr Runcie calls the book 'an outrageous slur on the prophet',[151] he is attacking Rushdie's right to produce unofficial versions of religious stories. Runcie is protecting his own position as leader of the Anglican Church by defending all religious ways of thinking against aggressive questioning and doubt.

The row over *The Satanic Verses* has given different groups in the West and in the Muslim world an important opportunity to address their differences, by throwing them into sharp conflict. Unfortunately, each side seems to be becoming more entrenched. Rushdie argues that the novel was an attempt to bring his worlds of India, Islam and the West closer together. He 'tried to describe each in terms of the other. Well it didn't work. [...] [I]f you look at the *event* of *The Satanic Verses* it pushed those worlds further apart'.[152]

The Fatwa transforms debates about faith and uncertainty, free speech and tolerance from abstract, intellectual exercises into urgent political issues. *The Satanic Verses* performs an invaluable service in revealing the nature of our Postmodern, multicultural world, and in exposing its points of conflict. However, it also demonstrates that literature still has a vital role to play in our on-going debates and the formation of new ideas.

POSTMODERN FICTION AS DEBATE

So, as I have argued, there are many ways of reading literature that engages with the Postmodern condition, and many formulations of Postmodernism. Each

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[151] Archbishop Dr Robert Runcie, in Tom Stoppard, 'Let Iran Make Amends on Rushdie', *Observer*, Sunday 9 February 1992, p.20.
[152] Salman Rushdie, in James Fenton, 'Keeping Up with Salman Rushdie', interview, *New York Review of Books*, 6 (28 March 1991), 26-34 (p.31).

reading focuses upon different aspects of Postmodern uncertainty and to some extent re-enacts the concerns and approach of the theorist who creates it.

Postmodern readings are all 'literary-historical fictions' constructed by readers, writers and critics, and 'none of them any less "true" or less fictional than the others, since *all* of them are finally fictions' (*PF*, p.4). Hutcheon holds that the fictional nature of literary constructs means that 'none [are] more right or wrong than the others'.[153] However, this implies that because fiction is non-material it is not real and therefore beyond judgement.

McHale contends that 'just because there are many possible constructions of postmodernism [...] this does not mean that all constructs are equally interesting or valuable, or that we are unable to choose among them' (*PF*, p.4). Despite the breakdown of legitimacy and authority, critics, including Hutcheon and McHale, continue to disagree and to make descriptive statements. The critical debate about Postmodernism demonstrates that the loss of credibility for justifying metanarratives has encouraged, rather than discouraged, the search for justification and answers in Postmodern society. Literature is also part of this cultural search for new justifications and meanings.

As literature challenges the certainties of grand-narratives, such as religious and political ideologies, it adopts uncertain forms. Postmodern literature creates series of debates because these present the inability of texts to accept set positions and answers that erroneously claim to be universal and absolute. By presenting issues in conflict without offering a firm conclusion, fiction is able to bring its readers actively into the arguments.

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[153] Hutcheon, *Politics*, p.11.

Postmodern texts are written once by the authors and endlessly by the readers as they are read. All literature has to leave a space for readers to fill with their imaginations. Postmodern fiction focuses upon this process to extend the discussions out of the pages of the novels, and into the wider society through the conscious participation of the readers.

Uncertainty pervades all aspects of Postmodern literature but is not expressed as a transcendent certainty. Uncertainty is not an eternal truth that literature sets out to prove, but a temporal condition which this literature explores. Rather than considering uncertainty to be a state of ignorance, capable of being solved by objective reasoning and further information, the Postmodern world is presented as uncertain because it has no certainty. Postmodern society is confused because it is uncertain, not because it lacks some higher truth. This new way of observing uncertainty offers an explanation for the current mood of confusion without resolving the lack of certainty.

Literature examines uncertainty by provoking the desire to resolve and to order, but then refuses to fulfil these expectations. Rushdie describes Postmodern fictions as 'using the machinery of the fable but without wishing to point a simple moral'.[154] He points out that 'Calvino is described as a fabulist, but his stories don't have morals: they're shaped like fables, they have the characteristics of fables, but without the purpose' (p.247). Fables are highly structured and morally certain texts 'designed inexorably to reach that moral statement which the story is seen to have proved' (p.247). Postmodern literature takes the form of the fable, to test ideas, but fails to deliver the standard conclusion.

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[154] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.247.

Italo Calvino's collection of fable romances, *Our Ancestors*[155] constantly describes situations resonant with symbolic meaning, but resolutely refuse to provide final significances. While it is possible to extract fragments of meaning from the stories they do not lay themselves open to total explanations. The hero of 'The Baron in the Trees' spends his whole adult life living in trees after a family argument, but his stubborn gesture is not demonstrated to be transcendent.

Many aspects of the Baron's life are admirable, including his will, heroism, individuality and environmental concern, however, few people establish long relationships with him, some of his projects fail, he goes mad, and becomes a sorry figure before his death. His life is a collection of good and bad moments, like any life, rather than representing a special example. His symbolic meaning may be that his life has no greater symbolic meaning or pattern than any other person's life.

Calvino explains that:

> The tale is born from the image, not from any thesis which I want to demonstrate, and the image is developed in a story according to its own internal logic. The story takes on meanings, or rather, around the image extends a network of meanings that are always a little uncertain, without insisting on an unequivocal, compulsory interpretation. More than anything else it is a case of moral themes suggested by the central image, and developed in the secondary stories. [...] [I]n the *Baron*, themes of isolation, distance, difficulties in relationships with others. [...] I will give no more than these very general points because the reader must interpret the stories as he will, or else not interpret them at all and read them simply from enjoyment – which would fully satisfy me as a writer.[156]

In one reading, the Baron's life can be seen as a defiant gesture of individuality and eccentricity flying in the face of conventions. Calvino suggests that he can

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[155] Italo Calvino, *Our Ancestors*, trans. by Archibald Colquhoun (London: Minerva, 1992, (1980)); comprising *The Cloven Viscount* (Torino, Italy: Giulio Einaudi, 1951), *The Baron in the Trees* (1957) and *The Non-Existent Knight* (1959).

[156] Italo Calvino, 'Introduction', *Our Ancestors*, intro. trans. by Isabel Quigly (London: Minerva, 1992, (1980)), pp.vii-x (p.ix).

also be seen as a model of human isolation. But neither reading is more correct than the other, and both are secondary to enjoying the story. Calvino privileges the independence of the readers, refusing even to insist that they make any interpretation.

By subverting the fable, Calvino's Postmodern works not only deconstruct yet another example of certainty in literature and ethics, but adapt fable's processes of testing ideas. Instead of making the process lead inevitably to an already established conclusion, Postmodern 'fables' no longer pretend to prove a purpose. They examine many ideas, which may mutate and evolve, providing alternative ideas in the course of the stories, and ask readers to form their own opinions.

Rushdie describes *Shame* as being 'about ethics, about good and evil, but it doesn't tell you how to behave, whereas fable does. *Shame* is not morally didactic; it shows you something'.[157] Rushdie is able to examine complicated issues without the distraction of having to pretend that there are easy answers or abandoning hope of finding any answer at all.

The focus shifts from the ever-receding End of a given situation to the present, and onto the processes and abuses that are perpetrated in the name of bringing about that mythical End. However, the use of fable symbolism and structure constantly reminds readers that although the book does not dictate moral codes to them, anarchy is no guarantee of human rights. The issue of legitimacy has not become obsolete in the Postmodern age, but has become increasingly important and problematical.

Like Menippean Satires, Postmodern novels dramatise the uncertainties and concerns of their era. Contemporary literature portrays fictional confrontations

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[157] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.247.

between different discourses and worlds both to illustrate the Postmodern condition and to explore the consequences of those clashes. Postmodern fiction tests philosophical and aesthetic ideas and metanarratives through its narratives, but concentrates on the questioning process rather than trying to provide any final answers. The debates that are created tend to have an open structure, constantly confronting readers with dilemmas but refusing to help them find ways of accommodating the tensions.

The debate format is suited to drawing readers into the experience of the novels, since readers become not just the site of the debates between discourses, but are encouraged to become participants. Postmodern novels do not just construct abstract uncertainties, but engineer highly emotive and intractable confrontations that are likely to provoke emotional and intellectual responses. These confrontations include the organisation of society and repression of women and the poor in *Poor Things*, *1982, Janine* and *Something Leather*. Other confrontations are the lack of guarantees for human rights and the conflict between Western and Muslim cultures in *Shame*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Satanic Verses*.

Menippean satires and other quest literature feature Everyman or hero figures, who enact the philosophical or spiritual journey. Postmodern literature does sometimes have questing heroes, such as the Moor in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, or Saleem in *Midnight's Children*, but other texts have more reluctant or trivial searchers, or even no central character. Jock in *1982, Janine* is trying to avoid change until he is forced to look at his life again. In *Lanark*, Lanark stumbles into many quests but is only really looking for sunlight and happiness. *Dictionary of the Khazars* contains many people searching for many things, but no main character.

Postmodern literature may have transferred a reduced version of the questing, detective function of the Everyman or picaro to the reader in collusion and conflict with the text.

No simple, single debate can clearly be distinguished in every Postmodern text, although many novels explore metafiction and the philosophical dilemmas created by the inability to legitimate knowledge and beliefs. Novels such as *Lanark*, *1982, Janine*, *Poor Things*, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* seem to be more than expressions of Postmodern angst. They are not mere illustrations of uncertainty and incredulity towards metanarratives, or surrender all purpose, doing no more than play word games. Each novel contains its own set of concerns and uncertainty, and each attempts to address these in different ways, and achieve different effects.

However, the combined effect of the many debates that make up Postmodern thought can be generally summed up, with the danger of over-simplification, as enquiries into the current and potential nature and role of humanity and literature in contemporary Postmodern society. It is also important to stress that Postmodern literature is not single-mindedly engaged in serious philosophical quests. Postmodern debates are diffuse webs of trivial, personal, public, artistic and serious questions, examining many levels and aspects of society and literature, and each Postmodern novel idiosyncratically explores different parts of these debates in different ways.

Looking at Postmodern literature as debates may avoid something of the problem of describing that literature as merely plural or heterogeneous. Connor points out that 'the announcement [...] of heterogeneity always to some degree

flattens or "precludes" the possibility of such heterogeneity'.[158] A debate, on the other hand, while not necessarily implying texts as diverse as heterotopia, focuses attention on the specific arguments, disagreements and differences, rather than on a unifying structure of differentiation. Debating is also an activity, while heterotopia is an ontological state. Postmodern novels are indeed heterogeneous, but using the debate metaphor to describe them may go some way to revitalise the concept of difference.

Italo Calvino holds that all literature's power lies in its:

> ability to impose patterns of language, of vision, of imagination, of mental effort, of the correlation of facts, and in short the creation (and by creation I mean selection and organization) of a model of values that is at the same time aesthetic and ethical, essential to any plan of action, especially in political life.[159]

Literature's method of creating stories out of language and codes means that it can create narrative structures that satisfy the demands of art and ideas. Calvino suggests that these structures of the imagination are important elements in any philosophy, including political ideologies, and literary criticism. It would be impossible to create any plan without first imagining its situation, background, possible shape and vision.

Gray also thinks that fiction can:

> promote understanding [...] of the grounds of happiness [...] misery and [...] conflict, and in order to promote understanding of the grounds of our unhappiness and happiness, and our values, [...] you can only do it by presenting images of these and offering a pattern.[160]

Fictional representations, rather than didactic statements, are literature's means of conveying how discourses effect society. Despite undermining traditional

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[158] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.86.
[159] Calvino, 'Political Uses of Literature', p.99.
[160] Alasdair Gray, in Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay, 'Interview with Alasdair Gray', *Cencrastus* 13 (Summer 1983), 6-10 (p.6).

methods of representation and organising patterns in literature, Postmodern texts share all literature's ability to create fictions and patterns. The patterns that Postmodern texts create are related to their own situation and time.

Calvino qualifies his description of the value of contemporary literary organisation by adding that this is 'a type of education that can yield results only if it is difficult and indirect, if it implies the arduous attainment of literary stringency'.[161] Literature can only assist in the creation of larger mental structures if those structures are complex enough to satisfy fiction's own contradictory requirements. These include demands for tradition and novelty, emotions and reason, order and freedom, plans and subversion, excitement and comfort. Fiction must work aesthetically before it can contribute to any philosophical dialogue.

According to Calvino, literature must produce complicated structures because 'the construction of a mental order solid and complex enough to contain the disorder of the world within itself' involves the development of 'a method subtle and flexible enough to be the same thing as an absence of any method whatever' (p.99). Contemporary literature can only offer structures that produce ideas and actions for society if they are part of the Postmodern moment.

Any mental order large enough and complicated enough to encapsulate the entire confusing, deconstructive Postmodern world would mimic the conditions of that world. Postmodern literature aspires towards that complexity on every level. Debates in these texts are representations and continuations of debates in society, and act as dramatisations of the debate between society and literature, as literature struggles to assess its role in the uncertain Postmodern era.

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[161] Calvino, 'Political Uses of Literature', p.99.

Jean-Francois Lyotard characterises the art and literature which addresses the Postmodern condition as processes of discovery:

> A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for.[162]

Instead of setting out to follow established formulae or demonstrate pre-formed ideas, Postmodern texts set out on a journey. They are searching for new ideas, structures, patterns and ways of thinking which would meet the challenge of legitimating aspects of life and values without resorting to the discredited metanarratives or their methods.

Rushdie quotes O. Henry's story 'The Green Door', which claims that 'the true adventurer goes forth aimless and uncalculating to meet and greet unknown fate. A fine example was the Prodigal Son—when he started back home'.[163] The Postmodern text takes its readers on adventures through the complexity of society without achieving a set destination or goal. The process of uncalculating discovery gives the Postmodern text and work 'the characters of an *event*'.[164] But this also means that any rules developed will never be final since 'they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization [...] always begins too soon' (p.81). Postmodern fiction is driven both by its desire to find patterns and its equal unwillingness or even inability to be satisfied with any pattern it can find.

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[162] Lyotard, 'Answering the Question', p.81.
[163] O. Henry, 'The Green Door', *The Complete Works of O.Henry*, forward by Harry Hausen, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953), I, pp.62-68 (p.63). Orig. pub. *The Four Millions* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1906).
[164] Lyotard, 'Answering the Question', p.81.

Poor Things and *The Moor's Last Sigh* both debate some serious social issues, and both offer opinions about those situations and possible solutions. *Poor Things* celebrates the intellectual and economic potential of women and the grand narrative of Socialism is considered as a solution to the inequality of society. But versions of that narrative are also portrayed as totally materialistic, blind to the qualities and value of art, and careless of individuals in the name of abstract humanity. They are also demonstrated to have lacked support among the very groups that they hope to help during the first half of the twentieth century. This is because they failed to address emotional needs, such as patriotism and belonging, which drew many working-class men into the army during the First World War.

However, the novelist, Alasdair Gray, has been a supporter of Socialism since he 'became politically conscious shortly after the [Second World] War when in fact everything that is now regarded as Utopian fantasy was being immediately put into practice by a newly elected Socialist government'.[165] But Gray also remarks that his father was a Marxist who 'could not persuade' Gray that 'humanity would one day solve every problem it had the sense to recognise'.[166] *Poor Things* does not ridicule Socialism, but parodies idealistic dogmas, such as the solidarity of all workers and the worthlessness of all non-practical activity.

The novel examines Socialism in relation to the self-interested hypocrisy of Dr Hooker, and the cynical conservatism of Mr Astley, showing them to hold no hope for the disadvantaged poor. Mr Astley's political creed is his 'bitter wisdom' (*PT*, p.152), a pessimistic vision of the world which claims that 'life is an essentially painful disease which only death can cure' (p.156) and accepts that

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[165] Gray, in Kane, *Usual Suspects*, Radio Scotland.
[166] Alasdair Gray, *Alasdair Gray*, Saltire Self-Portraits, 4 (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1988), p.12.

injustices are unavoidable. Bella responds to this jaundiced philosophy by declaring that 'I will search as long as I live rather than be a childish fool or selfish optimist or equally selfish cynic' (*PT*, p.156). Bella represents the open-minded search for alternatives to ignorance and acquiescence to cruelty, while Victoria is a close-minded ideologue. Socialism is not presented as the cure of all evils, but offered as a possible approach, despite pit-falls and the dangers of inflexible belief.

The Moor's Last Sigh shows the conflict of narrow Hindu Nationalism and industrial corruption, but does not offer easy solutions or alternatives. Simple opposition is not shown to succeed miraculously or be an easy option. The Moor's sister is a campaigning anti-corruption lawyer, who is murdered because of her work, maybe even by her own father. The 'Hindu' enforcer gangs also beat up workers who strike and protest. The Moor does not make a moral stance against either force, but at various times actively works for both sides, accommodating himself in order to survive and prosper.

The extent of the economic and political influence of the corrupt means they cannot be avoided and that no aspect of Bombay life is entirely innocent any more. Innocents are blown-up in the bombing of Bombay along with the guilty. Even the painter Aurora, who does not paint party political pictures, is murdered; however, although she is not involved in the dirty side of Bombay, concentrating on her art, her work is not allowed to be innocent. Fielding hi-jacks her reputation and the interpretation of her work to score political points and to whip up popular hysteria, and Abraham's corruption supports her.

The Moor describes Aurora's involvement as 'a chosen blindness, her complicity the complicity of silence, of don't-tell-me-things-I-don't-want-to-

know, of quiet-I-am-busy-with-my-Great-Work' (*MLS*, p.107). Her refusal to acknowledge the dark activities that surround her does not save her from those same forces. And Western readers are not free from these forces either, since sectarian nationalism is not confined to India, and Abraham's empire is founded on international corruption. The novel does not offer an antidote to this poisonous element of Postmodern existence, but it highlights the impossibility of any person escaping from it, or ignoring it.

The refusal to create any new form of justifying myth is the literary expression of what Habermas described as the current 'Legitimation Crisis' (*LC*, p.74). Eagleton considers that the theory of Postmodernism offers a false way out of the dilemma for multinational capitalist society, which has destroyed the myths that once legitimated it. Postmodernism, according to Eagleton, suggests that it is possible to survive by simply removing the need to legitimate society.

However, this has far reaching consequences:

> [Postmodernism] asks [the social orders] to forget that the role of culture is not only to *reflect* social practice, but to *legitimate* it. Culture must not simply generate itself up from what we do, for if it does we will end up with all the worst kinds of values. It must also idealize those practices, lend them some metaphysical support.[167]

The Postmodernism that Eagleton attacks seems to be that of the Post-Structuralist theorists, rather than examples of Postmodern art; however, Postmodern literature has also accepted the inability to give practices 'some metaphysical support' (p.7).

Eagleton demands that literature contribute something to the creation of a set of values for society, despite also pointing out that culture is no longer plausible as the 'higher harmonization of our sublunary squabbles' (p.8). But Alasdair Gray protests that he cannot write contemporary affirmatory Socialist novels. In

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[167] Eagleton, *Crisis of Contemporary Culture*,' p.7.

Lanark, the author-character Nastler wanted to write the epic for a new Socialist 'Scottish Cooperative Wholesale Republic' (*L*, p.492) one of many small, Socialist republics which would replace the great empires:

> Well, I soon abandoned that idea. A conjuror's best trick is to show his audience a moving model of the world as it is with themselves inside it, and the world is not moving toward greater liberty, equality and fraternity. So I faced the fact that my world model would be a hopeless one. (p.493)

Gray himself suggests that he 'couldn't possibly write a pro-socialist Scottish separatist story that was told from the standpoint of a socialist'.[168] Robert Tressell successfully managed to write *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*[169] from a socialist perspective. But Gray believes that this is because Tressell had experience of being a worker while Gray feels middle-class and comfortable. He jokes that 'I have my sufferings! You'd be astonished how tardy publishers are in paying one!'.[170] The current ideological climate is quite hostile to traditional socialist ideas, and Gray feels unable to promote them unquestioningly from his affluent position.

The all-pervading abuses of human rights and corruption that Rushdie discusses in his novels are too widespread and subtle to allow him to suggest any simple or general solutions. After Nazism and Stalinism Rushdie suggests that it 'appears plain that it will be a very long time before the peoples of Europe will accept any ideology that claims to have a complete, totalized explanation of the world' (*IH*, p.422): Postmodern fiction acknowledges the depth of the disillusionment with metanarratives in order to communicate with readers, rather offering them easily discredited comfort.

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[168] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.34.
[169] Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, intro. by Alan Sillitoe (London: Panther, Granada, 1965, (1914)).
[170] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.34.

Postmodern culture cannot stand apart from the society that provokes it; however, it is debatable whether literature's inability to accept metanarratives legitimates the capitalist system in the way that Eagleton suggests. The novels of Alasdair Gray and Salman Rushdie do not celebrate the victory of a Nietzschean will to power, and are highly critical of many aspects of society, including capitalist economics, and various Establishments. Postmodern texts may not legitimate any existing society, but perhaps they are establishing another form of ethics, which refuses to accept any position at face value, and subjects every sacred idea to irreverent questions. The ethics of deconstruction is ideologically neutral, but each text gives its own political slant to Postmodern society.

The result of deconstruction may even result in the creation of a more tolerant, plural and ethically secure society in the future, as Lyotard hopes. This is reminiscent of Aurora's symbolic paintings celebrating the ideal plural state that they hope to help create. On the other hand, Postmodern cultural restlessness may also preclude any such society from coming into being, even if social and economic conditions allowed it.

Rather than legitimating current society or a future utopia, Postmodern literature legitimates a tense and uncomfortable relationship with society that helps citizens to live in an uncertain world but not surrender to it. The debate format also helps to prevent Postmodern literature from being perceived as doing nothing more than simply reacting to the failures of past metanarratives, without contributing new literary or philosophical ideas to the present and future. Postmodern literature is a positive approach to uncertainty.

ALIENATION AND CONNECTIONS:

THE POSTMODERN CRISIS OF HISTORY

POSTMODERN LITERATURE AND HISTORY

The uncertainty of the present, examined in the last section, has contributed to an impression that we have lost a sense of connection, and therefore continuous identity, with the past and future. Many of the central characters in the novels of Alasdair Gray and Salman Rushdie become disconnected from various aspects of their world and their own past or present. These disconnections are the result of profound alienation from society and human contact and cause the characters many serious problems. But whole countries are also seen divorcing themselves from their pasts in order to achieve a fresh start and a new future, often gaining a troubled present instead.

In order to create appropriate new identities, Postmodern literature uses history, historical literature, science fiction, the history of literature, past literary forms, parody and pastiche to revisit and interrogate our concepts of the past, present and future, and their relationship. Through this examination, Gray and Rushdie's novels also explore our perceptions of change, alienation and connection in Postmodern society.

History, like literature, is one of the cultural means with which people try to describe the world. These descriptions not only create a model for the world, but also give it meaning and purpose. They shape the way the world of experience is perceived, in order to fit it to that model. When a model can no longer contain the constantly changing world of experience it leads to the state of general uncertainty that Jürgen Habermas describes as a 'legitimation crisis' (*LC*, p.74).

Consequently, twentieth-century disillusionment with Enlightenment metanarratives has made history, along with literature and other disciplines, increasingly unsure of its own role and nature. Postmodern novels use debates about history, including literary history, to represent aspects of their own legitimation crisis, and to explore the general crisis in society.

POSTMODERNISM: HANDCUFFED TO HISTORY

Spanos believes that 'the Western structure of consciousness is bent, however inadvertently, on unleashing chaos in the name of the order of a totalized, well-made world'.[1] By trying to force the world to fit a false picture, society will increasingly damage itself. Postmodern literature can no longer 'afford the luxury' of Modernist strategies, because 'ours is no time for psychic flights' (p.46). Whether Postmodern literature can afford to indulge in escapism or not, many texts do seem to want to return to confront the problems of the world.

In Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,[2] Stephen Dedalus's journey into adulthood and Modernist alienation is a gradual slide into genteel poverty, which leads him to create an aesthetic of stasis. Saleem Sinai, however, in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, is violently hurled out of pampered comfort into disgrace, war, extreme poverty, torture and disintegration.

Saleem is desperately tempted by dreams of escaping out of history, and twice attempts to flee from life. When he is sickened by his memories he receives a blow to the head and gratefully accepts amnesia. Later he remembers this time as if he were another person, 'the buddha', meaning 'old man' (*MC*, p.349). But this

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[1] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.46.
[2] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1999, (1914-15)).

name also suggests the Buddha, not able to bear the sufferings of the world and trying to achieve a state where his body is present but his spirit is absent on a higher plane.

The buddha's amnesia disturbed his comrades in the Pakistani army. Saleem recalls that:

> in those days, the country's East and West Wings were separated by the unbridgeable land-mass of India; but past and present, too, are divided by an unbridgeable gulf. Religion was the glue of Pakistan, holding the halves together; just as consciousness, the awareness of oneself as a homogeneous entity in time, a blend of past and present, is the glue of personality, holding together our then and our now. Enough philosophizing: what I am saying is that by abandoning consciousness, seceding from history, the buddha was setting the worst of examples. (*MC*, p.351)

According to Saleem, the leaders of the East Wing followed his example of breaking the links between the past and present, when they seceded from Pakistan and created Bangladesh.

The buddha suffers from his attempts to escape his past. Once he is 'emptied of history, [he] learned the arts of submission, and did only what was required of him. To sum up: I became a citizen of Pakistan' (p.350). Without a history, the buddha has no moral, social, political context or ideas. He does not have any ambitions and does whatever the army asks. When he is asked to arrest political prisoners, he obeys without question. But eventually the events he witnesses and participates in give him more than enough history to regain a sense of horror, and again he flees, this time into a jungle, the Sundarbans.

This attempt to escape also leads to intolerable mental and physical pain, forcing Saleem to rejoin the world or die, only to be thrust back into his old, deteriorating life. After the trauma of the Emergency, Saleem's friends, the magicians, began to lose their memories and 'concentrated upon the present with

the monomania of snails' (*MC*, p.444). The magicians not only lose their conjuring skills but also their communist political convictions because by losing their memories 'they had become incapable of judgment, having forgotten everything to which they could compare anything that happened' (p.444).

Saleem's experiences of failed escape lead him to write not poetry, but his personal history, in order 'to give [his life] shape and form – that is to say, meaning' (p.461). But Saleem's concentration on the past is also dangerous, because he is 'no longer interested in anything new' (p.445). A woman who only lives in the present warns him 'that when a man loses interest in new matters, he is opening the door for the Black Angel' (p.446).

The Postmodern experience is 'mysteriously hand-cuffed to history' (p.9) because it cannot escape its uncertainties and disruptions. But it is no longer the progressive history of the Enlightenment. Postmodern history is a record of radical disruption and alienation, which Postmodern novels attempt to record, but also to negotiate. Without a sense of the past all judgement and justifications are gone, and might becomes right. Humanity becomes passive, at the mercy of the ruthless, ignorantly reliving mistakes and horrors of the past. However, the present and the future must also be addressed, for without them there is no life at all.

Spanos feels that:

> unlike the early modern imagination—indeed, in partial reaction against its refusal of historicity—the postmodern imagination, agonized as it has been by the ongoing crisis of the boundary situation that is contemporary history, is fundamentally a phenomenological/ existential imagination.[3]

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[3] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.15.

In *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus claims that 'History [...] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake'.[4] Unlike Dedalus, Postmodern literature squarely faces that nightmare, in order 'to engage literature in an ontological dialogue with the world on behalf of dis-covering the radical historicity of men and women'.[5]

Spanos feels that society still needs to have its desire to domesticate experience deconstructed because until then he feels it is incapable of responding to generous art (pp.48-49). However, despite Spanos's manifesto for generosity, Postmodernism does not consciously work to impose uncertainty on society as if it were a political ideology. Just as Modernist alienation from society and ultimately from history was a profound state, not a stylistic device, Postmodern uncertainty is itself generated from the legitimation crisis that global society is currently undergoing.

THE BREAKDOWN OF THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

There is considerable anxiety about the status of history in the Postmodern era. In *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*,[6] the historian Eric Hobsbawm claims that history is undergoing a crisis in the late twentieth century. He found evidence that 'the historical memory was no longer alive' (p.3) when people do not remember the significant dates of the century. He also found a startling level of ignorance about recent history:

> no one who has been asked by an intelligent American student whether the phrase 'Second World War' meant that there had been a 'First World War' is unaware that knowledge of even the basic facts of the century cannot be taken for granted. (p.3)

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[4] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler, Student edn. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986, (1922)), p.28.
[5] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.45.
[6] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Joseph, Penguin, 1994).

Hobsbawm sees the fading of the historical memory as an extremely important phenomenon:

> The destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century. Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in. This makes historians, whose business it is to remember what others forget, more essential at the end of the second millennium than ever before. But for that very reason they must be more than simply chroniclers, remembrancers and compilers.[7]

He sees the historical amnesia of recent generations as dangerous, allowing people to repeat the mistakes and the injustices of the past. He observes that history exists primarily in the traditions and 'social mechanisms' (p.3) which bond one generation to the next, not merely in textbooks.

The 'snapping of the links between generations, that is to say, between past and present' leads to 'a society consisting of an otherwise unconnected assemblage of self-centred individuals pursuing only their own gratification' (pp.15-16). This 'was always implicit in the theory of the capitalist economy' (p.16); the radical disruption of society by capitalism, which Karl Marx foresaw in 1848, has gradually happened, partly through weakening generational links.

Hobsbawm sees the disintegration of social bonds expressed as uncertainty about the relationship of the present with the past:

> At the end of this century it has for the first time become possible to see what a world may be like in which the past, including the past in the present, has lost its role, in which the old maps and charts which guided human beings, singly and collectively, through life no longer represent the landscape through which we move, the sea on which we sail. In which we do not know where our journey is taking us, or even ought to take us. (p.16)

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[7] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p.3.

Hobsbawm's metaphor of a Postmodern society that can no longer read its old maps echoes Fredric Jameson description of contemporary society.

As discussed earlier, Jameson suggests that we now lack spatial representations and need new forms of '*cognitive mapping*'[8] to chart Postmodern consciousness and social structures. The general incredulity towards traditional Enlightenment metanarratives and linear progress has thrown the relationship of the past and the present into confusion. Once the present is no longer sure about itself and the past, the future, an already uncertain domain, becomes virtually impossible to imagine.

THE HISTORICITY OF HISTORY

It is in the light of this temporal confusion that Jameson describes the Postmodern as:

> an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place. In that case, it either 'expresses' some deeper irrepressible historical impulse (in however distorted a fashion) or effectively 'represses' and diverts it. (p.ix)

Postmodern novels, which focus on what Jameson describes as the 'crisis in historicity' (p.25), express something of the Postmodern exploration of a time without certainty. However, it is debatable whether this age has 'forgotten how to think historically', in some decadent or deliberate fashion. Rather, we may be in a transitional phase, moving towards a yet incomplete new relationship with the past and future.

Jameson defines historicity as 'a perception of the present as history; [...] as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical

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[8] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.51.

perspective'.[9] We need to distance ourselves from the present in order to give it meaning because:

> the present—in this society, and in the physical and psychic dissociation of the human subjects who inhabit it—is inaccessible directly, is numb, habituated, empty of affect. Elaborate strategies of indirection are therefore necessary if we are somehow to break through our monadic insulation and to 'experience,' for some first and real time, this 'present,' which is after all all we have.[10]

Jameson claims that links between the past, present and future are created and recreated in order to give meaning and purpose to the present.

Following Lukács, Jameson argues that a sense of history, and historical fiction, was used to give a sense of perspective and meaning to a present which was in the throws of radical and dislocating change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

> in the moment of the emergence of capitalism the present could be intensified, and prepared for individual perception, by the construction of a historical past from which as a process it could be felt to issue slowly forth, like the growth of an organism. But today the past is dead, transformed into a packet of well-worn and thumbed glossy images. (p.152)

As Hobsbawm has noted, late twentieth-century Postmodern society has lost a great deal of its sense of the significance of history, but whether the past is actually dead for the present is not yet clear.

As historical images lose their established meaning, historicity is itself revealed as an historical phenomenon. The Postmodern age is not the first period that has lacked a clear sense of historical change. Jameson points out that works such as 'the history plays of Shakespeare or Corneille, *La Princesse de Clèves*, even Arthurian romance [...] affirm the past as being essentially the same as the

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[9] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.284.
[10] Fredric Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?', *Science-Fiction Studies*, 9:2 (July 1982), 147-58 (p.151).

present'.[11] In earlier eras, people and literature did not differentiate between the present and the past.

Where those early periods did not consider that any other time could have different concerns or values, Postmodern society and texts are reacting to Enlightenment perceptions that the temporal narrative of history is privileged as well as important. We now know better than to think that the past is essentially the same as the present. But we no longer seem to be able to relate to those differences and have difficulty seeing how the future could be markedly different from the present. However, Jameson creates an historical analysis to prove that historical thinking is no longer possible, demonstrating that his argument exaggerates the extent to which history is now defunct. He does this in order to defend a method of thought created to facilitate capitalism, but which he now sees as the only means of defeating capitalism.

While insisting on the historical condition of Postmodernism, and refusing to make moral judgements, Jameson sees the loss of historicity as highly damaging. He argues that:

> for political groups which seek actively to intervene in history and to modify its otherwise passive momentum (whether with a view towards channeling it into a socialist transformation of society or diverting it into the regressive reestablishment of some simpler fantasy past), there cannot but be much that is deplorable and reprehensible in a cultural form of image addiction which, by transforming the past into visual mirages, [...] effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe.[12]

Jameson believes that 'the whole point about the loss in postmodernism of the sense of the future is that it also involves a sense that nothing will change and

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[11] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.149.
[12] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.46.

there is no hope'.[13] Jameson wants to see an art that resurrects something of the notion of history in order to combat the loss of historicity.

Without a sense of history, political movements, according to Jameson, lose the ability to motivate planning and action against the status quo. As Postmodern society loses its ability to plan and act, its citizens become the victims of social and economic pressures, not the masters of their fate. Where Spanos sees the idea of realist mastery as repressive, Jameson sees Postmodern passivity as equally exploitative. Saleem's amnesia and the decline of the magicians in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* demonstrate that forgetting the past and becoming passive lays one open to being abused and abusing others.

Jameson's fears about passivity in the face of Postmodern uncertainty are justified, but his argument is heavily reliant on his overwhelming belief that the historical imagination is dead in the late-twentieth century. Paradoxically, he claims to detect 'the profound historicity of the genre itself' in historical fiction's 'increasing incapacity to register its content'.[14] He argues that historical novels, dramas and films are no longer received as vital insights into the progressive changes that have effected society, but as empty, costume dramas.

However, it is surely questionable whether most earlier societies were so simplistic, isolated or repressed that only one vision of their past development and future direction was entertained without doubt, argument and uncertainty. History has always been a narrative that attempts to make meaningful sense out of the confusion of experience, not its certainty.

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[13] Fredric Jameson, in Anders Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism: A Conversation with Fredric Jameson', in *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique*, ed. by Douglas Kellner, Postmodern Positions, 4 (Washington, DC: Maisonneuve Press, 1989), pp.43-74 (p.72).
[14] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.150.

It is also unlikely that the reception of historical fiction has changed quite as markedly as Jameson suggests. He cites Sir Walter Scott's historical romances as expressing the 'new consciousness' of history.[15] But some of Scott's contemporaries attacked these romances for trivialising and even perverting history, rather than praising them for revealing which moments in Britain's history were significant.

Jameson provides scant evidence that audiences are now less enthralled or convinced by historical dramas. He claims that Stanley Kubrick's film *Barry Lyndon*[16] is a 'remarkable reconstruction of a whole vanished 18th-century past'. However, it seems to be 'profoundly *gratuitous*, [...] its technical intensities far too great for any merely formal exercise, yet somehow profoundly and disturbingly unmotivated'.[17] This particular film is unusual and notorious for putting style before content, but Jameson seems to read it as typical of current historical dramas.

Jameson claims that he is not attacking the content of the film, but expressing a 'feeling that any other moment of the past would have done just as well' (p.150). From this, Jameson concludes that:

> The sense that this determinate moment of history is, of organic necessity, precursor to the present has vanished into the pluralism of the Imaginary Museum, the wealth and endless variety of culturally or temporally distinct forms, all of which are now rigorously equivalent. (p.150)

Jameson's description of this as the 'volatilization of what was once a *national* past' (p.150) points to the source of his feeling that history now lacks content.

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[15] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.149.
[16] *Barry Lyndon*, dir. by Stanley Kubrick (UK: Hawk Films, 1975).
[17] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.150.

The development of our global society must greatly multiply the number of historically significant events as historical narratives combine. This multiplication fragments our traditional historical narrative and creates further uncertainty, changing our relationship with the past without necessarily destroying our interest in history or historical consciousness. Today, history has become a much more complicated field, made up of many strands, and society has not yet established clear relationships with its new pasts and potential futures.

We are no longer entirely sure which of the many events, in many locations, are significant in the creation of our global society, and we are likely not to be aware of all those events. We have to learn many different histories, written from different, sometimes contradictory, perspectives in order to create new narratives. In our international present, we find that our own narrow national pasts no longer bind, or wholly determine us.

Jameson's pessimistic view of our present situation is a personal interpretation of the continuing transitional phase of historicity, while we are still engaged in creating new historical narratives. If historicism is a historical phenomenon, as Jameson suggests, then it must also change and develop alongside society. Each age produces the historical dramas and stories that are important to the people of the time, and Postmodern literature is deeply involved in this historical process.

POSTMODERN PASTICHE AND PARODY

Jameson admits that 'everything in our culture suggests that we have not [...] ceased to be preoccupied by history'.[18] However, he concludes that using historical images in. a non-historical manner diverts most of our historical

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[18] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.286.

impulses. He describes these ahistorical works as 'nostalgia' art.[19] Nostalgia art presents historical material as 'images, simulacra, pastiches of the past. It is effectively a way of satisfying a chemical craving for historicity with a product which is a substitute for it and which blocks it'.[20] Combining past images in new juxtapositions may obscure their historical context and this can change or even destroy the present's relationship with those earlier times. According to Jameson, in nostalgia art 'the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history'.[21]

Jameson's interpretation again rests heavily upon his assumption that history is on the wane in the Postmodern era, and that the recombining of historical images damages historicity. Jameson differentiates this historical pastiche firmly from parody, which he argues was characteristic of Modernist work. He makes a highly political distinction between pastiche and parody, claiming that:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse. (p.17)

Jameson's definition of pastiche as 'neutral' is correct, however, his vision of parody endows it with far more 'satiric impulse' than is necessarily the case. Where pastiche is a collage of works or imitations, or the imitation of a style or work, parody is the exaggeration of a style or work. It is also a practice that in itself is neutral, and both techniques can be equally politically motivated or frivolous.

The root of Jameson's objection to pastiche is the eclectic use of past images and styles, and the subsequent possibility of losing an historical context. Jameson

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[19] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.19.
[20] Jameson, in Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism', p.60.
[21] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.20.

calls this '"historicism," namely, the random cannabalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion'.[22] He believes that this random use of past images changes our relationship with the past. According to Jameson, as the past is reduced to interchangeable images we can no longer see the linear development of the past into the present extending towards the future. We are left with a 'simulacrum' of a past, instead of the 'retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future' (p.18).

Jameson admits that pastiche is 'not incompatible with a certain humor, however, nor is it innocent of all passion'. It is 'at the least compatible with addiction—with a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and "spectacles" (the term of the situationists)' (p.18). The Situationists, lead by Guy Debord, were French theorists who analysed capitalist culture in the sixties. In 1967, Debord argued that 'when culture becomes nothing more than a commodity, it must also become the star commodity of the spectacular society'.[23]

The consequences of the commodification of images for western society have been very important and far-reaching. Debord claimed that the uncertainty of multinational capitalism and its privileging of images and representations had made all of contemporary life into 'an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation' (paragraph 1).

Debord's theory of a society of the Spectacle has influenced many thinkers, including Jameson and Jean Baudrillard, the Poststructuralist. Baudrillard

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[22] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.18.
[23] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, no trans. named, rev. edn. (Detroit, MI: Black and Red, 1977), paragraph 193. Orig. pub. (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967).

considers that a common perception of reality has been replaced by more and more representations and simulacra in a frenzy of attempts to find a reality that no longer exists. The simulation of reality by western society is a 'hyperreality' constantly trying to be more real than reality.[24]

Debord's later study, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, returns to the issue of spectacular society, and concludes that society is now totally filled with empty images.[25] However, Terry Eagleton suggests that Debord's work 'is thus interestingly self-refuting, since if its thesis is literally true, it could never have been written'.[26] If the image was totally dominant it would no longer appear as anything other than reality, and no criticism of the spectacular society as non-reality, or anything else, would be possible.

Linda Hutcheon disagrees with Jameson that Postmodern pastiche is entirely devoid of political motivation or historical context. However, she also seems to think that parody is a more politically active and acceptable form of literature, since she redefines Postmodern 'pastiche' as 'parody':

> What I mean by 'parody' here [...] is *not* the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth-century theories of wit. The collective weight of parodic *practice* suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity.[27]

Hutcheon sees traditional parody as being ridiculing or humorous, but she seems to find the term pastiche even less acceptable, since it is more obviously neutral.

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[24] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.57.
[25] 'The spectacle has spread itself to the point where it now permeates all reality', Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990), p.9. Orig. pub. (Paris: Gérard Lebovici, 1988).
[26] Terry Eagleton, 'The Death of the Authors', *New Statesman & Society*, 3:133, 11 January 1991, 35-36 (p.36).
[27] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.26.

In analysing Postmodern pastiches, which eclectically use images and events from the past, Hutcheon bases her argument on Postmodern architecture. She characterises the strong Postmodern tendency towards history and politics as a reaction against Modernism:

> just as modernism (oedipally) had to reject historicism and to pretend to a parthenogenetic birth fit for the new machine age, so postmodernism, in reaction, returned to history, to what I have been calling 'parody,' to give architecture back its traditional social and historical dimension, though with a new twist this time'.[28]

She finds pastiche to be too uninvolved a term, and uses parody to indicate the serious intent of Postmodern works. Like Jameson, Hutcheon confuses Postmodern political and historical motivations with specific literary techniques. Neither pastiche nor parody are intrinsically satirical, it is the use that works make of these techniques, and the conditions of their reception, which create their meanings.

Hutcheon claims that works created out of collages of the past and present can create new forms of historical context by a 'kind of historical interrogation or ironic contamination of the present by the past' (p.29). Rather than destroying our linear relationship with the past, Hutcheon suggests that pastiche can engender a new historicity because 'memory is central to this linking of the *past* with the *lived* ' (p.29). Postmodern effects are generated through a remembrance of the earlier historical moments and their difference from the present. Hutcheon believes that 'this parody paradoxically enacts both change and cultural continuity' (p.26). A complete breakdown of the historical imagination would indeed render Postmodern eclecticism completely meaningless, but since the

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[28] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.26.

juxtapositions of the present and the past can still provoke debate and interpretation, this has not yet occurred.

Steven Connor agrees that:

> Where modernist architecture seemed to celebrate its absolute break with the past in its rigorous purging of all archaism, postmodernism shows a new willingness to retrieve and engage with historical styles and techniques'.[29]

Rather than trying to revitalise an archaic form of historicity, Postmodern architecture and literature express the waning of old visions of history, and the new, but confused, relationships between the past and the present. They contribute to the creation of a contemporary version of historicity.

Although Jameson overstates his case that history is totally compromised, Hutcheon is too confident about the stability of an anti-Establishment history. Postmodern historicity is deeply uncertain and changing:

> one can't wish this postmodern blockage of historicity out of existence by mere self-critical self-consciousness. If it's the case that we have a very real difficulty in imagining the radical difference with the past, then this difficulty cannot be overcome by an act of will, by deciding that this is the wrong kind of history to have and that we ought to do it in some other way.[30]

Postmodern literature is forced to use historical material in new ways because traditional ways of imagining the past and the future are no longer appropriate or available.

IMAGINING THE FUTURE

The processes that have weakened links with the past have also damaged concepts of the future. Alvin Toffler's concept of 'future shock'[31] and David

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[29] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.82.
[30] Jameson, in Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism', p.61.
[31] Toffler, *Future Shock*, p.44.

Harvey's ideas about 'time–space compression'[32] are demonstrations of Postmodern society's new approach to its future. Jameson believes that the Postmodern 'relationship to our own present both includes elements formerly incorporated in the experience of the "future" and blocks or forestalls any global vision of the latter as a radically transformed and different system'.[33] Constant change is now part of our present, rather than our past or future. The peculiar background of Postmodern consciousness is that change is now familiar and that radical difference is harder to detect.

Even fictions about future catastrophes are no longer shocking, partially because they have become clichés. But also because there is a 'conviction [...] that there is only the present and that it is always "ours," [...] defamiliarization, the shock of otherness, is a mere aesthetic effect and a lie' (p.286). An all-embracing present has entwined both historical images of the past and the difference of the future. Jameson wonders if this Postmodern consciousness 'is simply an ultimate historicist breakdown in which we can no longer imagine the future at all' (p.286).

One method for renewing a 'practical sense of the future' (p.46) is by interrogating Science Fiction; those narratives most involved in trying to imagine the future. Jameson is interested in what lies behind the predictions and opinions of science fiction to trace 'the outlines of some deeper and vaster narrative movement in which the groups of a given collectivity at a certain historical conjuncture anxiously interrogate their fate, and explore it with hope or dread'.[34]

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[32] Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, p.240.
[33] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.285.
[34] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.148.

Jameson calls this narrative movement 'the political unconscious'.[35] The nature of the political unconscious:

> will be registered above all in terms of properly narrative categories: closure, recontainment, the production of episodes [...] Yet such narrative categories are themselves fraught with contradiction: in order for narrative to project some sense of a totality of experience in space and time, it must surely know some closure, [...] however, closure or the narrative ending is the mark of that boundary or limit beyond which thought cannot go. (p.148)

These boundaries dramatise the limits of any given society, although Jameson is again at risk of equating literary techniques with political motivations.

Jameson finds science fiction particularly useful because it encounters these limits at:

> the level of plot itself [...] the most obvious ways in which an SF novel can wrap its story up—as in an atomic explosion that destroys the universe, or the static image of some future totalitarian world-state—are also clearly the places in which our own ideological limits are the most surely inscribed. (p.148)

Science fiction developed with Jules Verne in the mid-nineteenth century just as historical fiction was beginning to decline in significance, according to Jameson. Science fiction 'registers some nascent sense of the future, and does so in the space on which a sense of the past had once been inscribed' (p.150) defining society against what might replace it, instead of what went before.

Despite science fiction's futuristic content 'it is this present moment [...] that upon our return from the imaginary constructs of SF is offered to us in the form of some future world's remote past, as if posthumous and as though collectively remembered' (p.152). Science fiction is related to historical fiction, defamiliarising the uncertain present for us as 'the determinate past of something yet to come' (p.152). The present is examined as 'the past of some unexpected

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[35] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.148.

future rather than as the future of a heroic national past'.[36] Jameson describes Science Fiction as 'a trope of the future anterior'.[37] This trope operates equally effectively whether the future described is optimistic or pessimistic, because it is an unconscious structural element of the genre.

Jameson's theory that science fiction has almost entirely superseded historical fiction is an overstatement. Science fiction is certainly a younger genre, and there has been considerable amount written this century, but there is still a place for historical fiction. However, Jameson is right that science fiction gives us another useful form of enquiry into the state of the present, especially when it is so hard to imagine the future.

Some Postmodern fiction has adopted aspects of Science Fiction in an effort to interrogate the present and create new relationships between it and the future and the past. Unlike conventional science fiction, Postmodern science fiction novels do not use realist techniques, and remain self-reflexive metafictions. Rather than being 'unwitting and even unwilling vehicles'[38] of the political unconscious, Postmodern science fiction self-consciously highlights and engages with the dilemmas of the Postmodern moment.

POSTMODERN SCIENCE FICTION AND *A HISTORY MAKER*

Postmodern science fiction uses science fiction techniques and situations in conjunction with other genres and ideas, including aspects of historical novels. These texts express the eternal, uncertain present of the Postmodern moment, adrift from both the past and the future. They also attack the inappropriate but still

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[36] Jameson, in Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism', p.60.
[37] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.285.
[38] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.153.

powerful Enlightenment realist forms of history while considering what forms new, more open sorts of history might take in the future.

Alasdair Gray's novel *A History Maker* is a science fiction romance, set during the twenty-third century. In the Prologue the 'editor' states that the story:

> meditates on human change. It antidotes a dangerous easy-oasy habit of thinking the modern world at last a safe place, of thinking the past a midden too foul to steep our brains in. [...]
>
> This wish not to see how we got here is ancient, not modern. Over three hundred years ago Henry Ford said, 'History is bunk.'[39] (*HM*, p.xiv)

This is a direct attack on the tendency to believe the present is eternal and to forget the lessons of the past. Without imagined connections with the past it becomes possible to assume that humanity has changed to the extent that society will remain constant.

Alienation from the past, whether deliberate, philosophic or unconscious, can lead to a dangerous complacency and alienates people from the future and their own responsibility for its development. As the 'editor' of *A History Maker* reminds us, Ford was unable to recognise that his own industry's over-production helped to create the 1929 crash and the Depression. Instead, he advocated fascism to cure America's industrial decline. The editor point out that 'ignorance of the past fogged his view of the present and blinded him to the future' (p.xv).

The 'editor' describes her own time as 'MODERNISM' (p.203), echoing the Renaissance period, which described the civilisation after the Middle Ages as 'The Modern World' (p.200). The 'editor' explains how 'Some historians felt so pleased with their part of Europe that they thought history had reached a lasting state of perfection' (p.200). The 'editor' gives examples from the seventeenth,

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39 'History is more or less bunk', Henry Ford, interviewed by Charles N. Wheeler, *Chicago Tribune*, 25 May 1916.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, implying that each form of 'perfection' was an illusion, superseded by another, equally transient stage.

Twenty-third century Modernism also suffers from the delusion that perfection has defeated history. It divides its historical periods into 'Prehistory, before people lived in cities'; 'History' when people increasingly lived in cities; and 'Modernity' (*HM*, p.203) when new technologies made cities and commercial culture obsolete. By describing only one part of the past as 'History' and dividing it off from their present the 'editor' suggests that her civilisation is doomed to forget that radical change is always possible.

When the 'editor' gives her history of human civilisations, she describes the late twentieth century in a highly critical manner:

> POSTMODERNISM happened when landlords, businessmen, brokers and bankers who owned the rest of the world had used new technologies to destroy the power of labour unions. Like owners of earlier empires they felt that history had ended because they and their sort could now dominate the world for ever. This indifference to most people's wellbeing and taste appeared in the fashionable art of the wealthy. Critics called their period *postmodern* to separate it from the modern world begun by the Renaissance when most creative thinkers believed they could improve their community. Postmodernists had no interest in the future, which they expected to be an amusing rearrangement of things they already knew. Postmodernism did not survive disasters caused by 'competitive exploitation of human and natural resources' in the twenty-first century. (pp.202-203)

This description is presented as both a critique of our civilisation and a warning to her own century, about complacency to historical processes. According to the 'editor', the dominant members of twentieth-century society ignored the lessons of 'earlier empires' by believing that history had ended. However, they were wrong and discovered, to their cost, that the future is alien and full of unexpected consequences. The Note makes a clear connection between ignorance of the past and a dangerous disregard for the future.

Although the 'editor' informs readers that Postmodern society destroys itself before the foundations of a healthier civilisation were laid, this has yet to happen. Our present seems as comfortable and open to many Western readers as the present of the book does to the characters. The 'editor' uses the 'end' of the Postmodern society as a parable to warn twenty-third century society about change. But the unpredictable changes that occur in that future society, combined with the specific warnings about our doom, act as a warning to the Postmodern present. We need to remember that history has not ended and that change is inevitable.

The recent crisis of history has indeed led thinkers such as Francis Fukuyama to believe that History has ended since society has achieved perfection. He claims that, taken together with capitalism, 'liberal democracy may constitute the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government," and as such constituted the "end of history"'[40]

Fukuyama points out that this 'end of history' does not mean that important events will cease to occur 'but History: that is, history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all peoples in all times' (p.xii) has reached its climax. Fukuyama believes in the Enlightenment vision of history as a meaningful, linear and organic sequence of events that have formed the Western world.

Although Fukuyama claims to be recording a 'trans-historical' narrative, which 'would free us from the tyranny of the present' (p.138), his thesis is steeped in post-Cold War and Postmodern preoccupations and uncertainties of this present.

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[40] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Oxford: Free Press, 1992), p.xi. Orig. pub. as 'The End of History?', *National Interest*, 16 (Summer 1989), 3-18, and since revised.

He gives inconsistent values to events and founds his supposedly universal history upon the collapse of the Soviet Union. Jacques Derrida describes this shift from measurable, empirical evidence to unmeasurable, abstract 'nature' as a 'sleight-of-hand trick'.[41]

Fukuyama's thesis is an overtly political defence of capitalism at a time when its future is uncertain, and its dominance 'has never been so critical, fragile, threatened, even in certain regards catastrophic, and in sum bereaved' (p.68). Derrida believes that by noisily trumpeting the victory of capitalism over communism, Fukuyama and his followers seek 'to hide, and first of all from themselves' (p.68), the economic, social and technological modernising forces which actually destroyed the Soviet Union. These forces also threaten the present form of the western democracies.

Finally, Derrida agrees with many other theorists that the appearance of works such as Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* 'obliges one to wonder if the end of history is but the end of a *certain* concept of history' (p.15). Fukuyama's attempt to claim that Enlightenment History has ended in triumph is revealed to be a politically motivated act and fails to convince. But it unconsciously demonstrates the Postmodern uncertainty that has discredited its vision of history.

Gray's *A History Maker* also expresses our Postmodern present by highlighting the breakdown of the Enlightenment historical imagination and the perception of an eternal present. But it also tries to create new historical connections from within this situation. In her concluding Notes, the 'editor' gives a brief history not

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41 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, intro. by Bernd Magus and Stephen Cullenberg (London: Routledge, 1994), p.69. Orig. pub. (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

of the linear development of civilisations, but of human thought. She describes the different ways that civilisations label their pasts, and thus reveal their own attitudes and hopes.

The 'editor' finds the changing attitudes to historical change and links to the past and future to be more informative about those separate moments than any single historical record. But she is able to recognise and distinguish these different moments in this manner only because her society no longer has a single historical perspective. It is actually losing its ability to imagine itself as part of any history at all.

Although the story seems to concentrate on educating the future about the past, the novel continually connects these events with our present, trying to forge imaginative links with both the past and the future. While the 'editor' is speaking to the readers of the twenty-third century, the novel addresses twentieth-century readers. The Notes frequently compare the two centuries, as well as reminding us of earlier ones, and the narrative constantly draws attention to a strange mixture of past, present and future features.

For instance, the future of the first chapter consists of a strange mixture of periods. The battle is fought using futuristic extrapolations of present technology, such as floating television cameras, but combatants have ancient weapons, clothes and battle conditions. The sides have names reminiscent of both early twentieth-century football teams and trade unions. The battle has rules set by an international body, combining the rules governing war with those covering football, and indeed television commentators and pundits cover the action as if it were sport. The battle evokes the Scottish and English border warfare of the past, replayed as a game in the future.

The effect of these anachronistic events is to focus the readers' attention on the juxtaposition of the simultaneously familiar and alien scene with the present. This is not a strategy to concentrate readers upon our eternal present, but to connect our time with that of past and possible future eras. By using eclectic collages of images, the novel acknowledges that traditional, linear, imaginative links between times no longer seem adequate, and new forms of connections must be created. However, without some continuing knowledge of what constitutes a past image or a futuristic one this new form of history would not work. Pastiche works not to remove context, but to give it a new expression, presenting the present synchronously as an organic part of history.

DREAMING ABOUT UTOPIA

Fukuyama's vision of the Utopian 'Promised Land of liberal democracy'[42] leads him to a Postmodern uncertainty about the future of humanity without Enlightenment history to connect the past and future to the present. He worries that without history to drive them, people will become contemptibly passive. He asks 'is not the man who is completely satisfied by nothing more than universal and equal recognition something less than a full human being, indeed, an object of contempt, a "last man" with neither striving nor aspiration?' (pp.xxii-xxiii). Fukuyama expresses a typical Postmodern distrust of his own utopian vision, because he cannot believe that a society without change will not stagnate.

According to Jameson, science fiction's greatest strength:

> is not at all its capacity to keep the future alive, even in imagination. On the contrary, its deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future, to body forth, through apparently full representations which prove on

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[42] Fukuyama, *End of History*, p.xv.

> closer inspection to be structurally and constitutively impoverished, the atrophy in our time of [...] the *utopian imagination*, the imagination of otherness and radical difference; to succeed by failure, and to serve as unwitting and even unwilling vehicles for a meditation, which, setting forth for the unknown, finds itself irrevocably mired in the all-too-familiar, and thereby becomes unexpectedly transformed into a contemplation of our own absolute limits.[43]

Science fiction, like Fukuyama, fails fully to imagine fundamental change or to escape from the present system and its concerns. But through its failure those concerns and the limits of contemporary thought, such as our present inability to imagine utopias, or their inverse, dystopias, are exposed for examination.

According to Jameson, in Western society utopian thought is often seen as dangerous, leading 'to Stalin's camps, to Pol Pot, and [...] to the "massacres" of the French Revolution'.[44] Alasdair Gray points out that if writers attempt to create non-capitalist science fiction but 'present ideas for how things might be organised better [...] you're in danger of Utopianism [...] which is now a bad word'.[45]

Utopias and dystopias both contain 'virulent contradictions' which highlight their own ideological limits. Jameson argues that George Orwell's dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four*[46] attempts to 'dramatize the tyrannical omnipotence of a bureaucratic elite, with its perfected and omnipresent technological control'.[47] But the novel 'subsequently overstates its case in a manner which specifically undermines its first ideological proposition' (p.155). Without some creative freedom, the advanced technology needed for total control cannot be created. But there is no freedom, and science and technology seem to be in retreat.

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[43] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.153.
[44] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.335.
[45] Gray, in Kane, *Usual Suspects*, Radio Scotland.
[46] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1954, (1949)).
[47] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.155.

It is not, however, clear that continuing creative technology is needed to keep Airstrip One's population under surveillance or at war. Orwell's novel is considerably more subtle than this argument suggests. Repression is constant in this society precisely because people keep having independent thoughts, not because they have perfected science. Where Orwell becomes overly pessimistic and contradictory is in his final portrayal of Winston Smith, absolutely brainwashed not only to change his thoughts and behaviour but also to love his torturer.

Both dystopian and utopian fiction fails to produce the absolute pictures of freedom or repression that they attempt. But in failing they demonstrate 'our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself, [...] not owing to any individual failure of imagination but as the result of the systematic, cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners'.[48]

Some utopian science fiction self-consciously highlights this problem. Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*[49] describes George Orr's ability actually to change the world through his dreams, but he cannot dream Utopia. Through Orr's failure, and through the failure of the novel to represent Utopia, the text demonstrates something of the impossible nature of Utopia. While challenging false ideas about the end of history *A History Maker* also self-consciously demonstrates our inability to imagine the future, or to produce visions of utopia, while using representations of the future to defamiliarise the present.

A History Maker concerns a seemingly stable Utopian society, which has overcome many of the world's current problems, and the series of events that

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[48] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.153.
[49] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven* (London: Gollancz, 1979, (1971)).

overtakes it. The 'editor' introduces the text with a warning 'that good states change as inevitably as bad ones, and should be carefully watched' (*HM*, p.xv). This is a self-conscious narrative about the difficulty of creating a utopian society, and about the dangers of complacency with the impossibility of avoiding radical change.

One of the few characters who are interested in history in *A History Maker* is Delilah, who is part of a plot to bring back instability and exploitation. Her group attempts to force change on what they see as a 'stale, smug and stupid' (p.219) society. They do this in the name of '*progress*' (p.116), and in the hope that they will be able to take power. But their final excuse is that they are bored, and 'dislike modern life so wanted to make it more exciting' (p.218). This excuse seems closely related to the sudden increase in enthusiasm for military action in mainstream society.

Utopian society has become boring and frustration provokes change, but does not lead to any inevitable outcome. Both groups imagine that they will recreate past situations in the future. The plotters try to recreate imperial conquest and industrialisation, while the soldiers want to enhance their old war games with variations from the past, but each group's actions cancels the others out.

The turbulent events of the novel dramatise the possibility of radical change. By portraying another, unfamiliar society suddenly changing through the confused eyes of its citizens the text can separate the idea of revolutionary change from the concept of never-ending Postmodern change. Changing attitudes, fashions and structures have become our paradoxically stable background. People have adapted to expect continual change in the late twentieth century. So the concept of another sort of change so radical that it can alter all aspects of society fundamentally, even its consciousness and awareness of its past, is hard to grasp. By describing a

different, future society undergoing dislocating change, the novel is able to revitalise our weakened concept of change.

At the same time, the novel is unable directly to demonstrate the consequences of radical social change or Utopia. Only the sense of dislocating change and uncertainty is portrayed in any immediate way, in the memoirs of the hero, Wat Dryhope. Accounts of relative stability and purposeful action that are more distant frame Wat's memories. The Prologue, Notes and Postscript chapters give brief historical summaries of the linking events that happened between the twentieth and twenty-third centuries and after the action of the narrative. These summaries baldly conclude the dilemmas of the twentieth century, neatly conclude the events of the story, and have a profoundly different effect than the main text.

The framing sections sharply contrast their sketched general conclusions with the detailed and personal uncertainties that Wat records. The frame purports to resolve the drama of the narrative, but the brief treatment of awesome problems seems unsatisfactory after the intensity of the main text. While the uncertain events of the narrative bring the future into intimated contact with the present, the objective frame reintroduces a sensation of alienation, paradoxically separating the present from the future through the very act of describing their relationship.

The text seems to prefer to deal with the events, experience and uncertainties of change, rather than pursuing its consequences in detail. The final society, which emerges after the partial destruction of twenty-third century, biological technology, is not futuristic. The new Utopia seems to be an idyllic version of eighteenth-century peasant life, supported by advanced technology and communications networks. But the attempt to sketch the unconvincing Utopia in

the Notes demonstrates that *A History Maker* cannot describe perfection, even briefly.

Even Wat's personal memoirs are not direct portrayals of the moment of change. As the 'editor' highlights, the narrative makes a 'sly shift from present to past tense in the first chapter' (*HM*, p.xi). The battle is a mass event seen from above, from the point of view of the 'public eye' (p.xi) television camera, but the rest of the action is written by Wat from his own perspective. The battle is also the turning point of twenty-third century, Modern society. After that battle, time ceases to be seen from an objective, distant perspective, since Wat and his society suddenly find themselves involved in change and living through a history they thought they had escaped from.

The eternal Modern present, which operated on predictable lines, is suddenly shattered as society changes. But society does not know what its relationship is with its past, what sort of future it wants, how to achieve it, or understands where it is heading. Wat and his society do not possess a steady relationship with either their past or their future. So they are condemned to inhabit a new form of uncertain temporal present, without reference to an objective perspective to make sense of it.

It is only after the crisis is resolved that Wat regains the ability to relate to the past, to reassess and shape it into a coherent narrative. However, this is also a time where he feels himself so divorced from the events he records that he describes himself in the third person. Wat entitles his memoirs 'A History Maker'. At first the 'editor' does not realise that this title is 'ironical' (p.ix), but Wat's tale does not make arrogant claims. He accurately details his role as the reluctant focus of all the various forces and actions of the novel. His memoirs are the record of his

brief flirtation with the idea that he could shape history, which the events of the novel shatter. Wat's tale is a demonstration that history is too big for any one individual to shape, but also that each individual's actions contribute to that history.

The 'editor' also imitates Wat's 'modesty' (*HM*, p.xv) by describing herself in the third person and adopting an objective tone. But *A History Maker* is not a naive call to return to realist History, and the 'editor' does not disguise her bias and ideology as the unmediated truth. Although the 'editor' does objectify herself, she only does this after she has introduced herself and her relationship with the events as Wat's mother, Kittock. She writes from a distance since she feels divorced from the events of the story by the conclusion of the events, and because she is an outsider in her society.

A History Maker is a new version of an early play by Gray, *The History Maker*.[50] Gray published a film outline for *The History Maker*,[51] which showed that the story was originally a dystopian rather than utopian fantasy. The original hero, Angus McEwan, is very much one of the discontented, frustrated because 'he *does not know* how to improve things' (p.128). Like Wat, Angus rejects the conspirators' plan, but unlike Wat, Angus goes to war against the conspirators. A 'desperately fanatical' Angus justifies the war by claiming it supports 'peace, prosperity and security' (p.129). He promises that he will try to 'end the war by Christmas'. The final images are streams of non-combatant refugees directed by

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50 Alasdair Gray, *The History Maker*, 1965. Play. Not performed. Listed in Bruce Charlton, 'Checklists and Unpublished Materials by Alasdair Gray', in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, ed. by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp.156-208 (p.156, p.168, p.194).

51 Alasdair Gray, 'The History Maker', Film Outline, *Chapman*, 50-51, 10:1 & 2 (Summer 1987), 128-131.

soldiers who have swapped their swords for guns. Gray declares that 'Patriarchy has been re-established'.[52]

Angus is indeed 'the' history maker, since he plays an active role in ruining his society. But the dystopian carnage that closes The History Maker is not a return to historical consciousness and the future, but to the past of the Second World War. Rather than creating a narrative that highlights radical change and the dangers of forgetting how to relate to the past, Gray's first version denies there can be change and demonstrates the unavoidable trap of the past. Even two centuries of peace cannot change human beings into fundamentally civilised creatures.

The History Maker does not even try to create a utopia. Its overbearing pessimism and return to the past demonstrates an inability to recognise its own limited vision of an eternal and unchanging present or to imagine the possibilities of an open future and real, radical change. While Angus changes history, his story is finally the passive voice of its era. *A History Maker*, on the other hand, makes a self-conscious effort to recognise its own limitations, and to suggest alternatives, both in its contents, and in its form. While this text fails to create a convincing utopian society, its very failure reveals the unachieveable nature of utopia, aspects of the present and ways of imagining radical change.

THE FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION OF *LANARK*

A History Maker attempts to create a picture of a plausible future society, containing projected technological wonders, rather than any wild fantasies. Other Postmodern science fictions do not limit themselves in this way. Gray's earlier

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[52] Gray, 'The History Maker', *Chapman*, p.129.

novel *Lanark* frames sections of social realism within sections of fantastic science fiction.

Rather than producing a science fiction narrative that is a possible future of our present, *Lanark* creates a strange and fantastic realm that is ambiguously connected to the past, present and future. Instead of reducing the complexities and uncertainties of the recent past and the present to a 'determinate past'[53] collectively remembered, the science fiction of *Lanark* manages to intensify the present without sacrificing its ambiguities.

Lanark is subtitled *A Life in Four Books* but it presents the story of two men. Lanark inhabits a surreal, science fiction version of Scotland, while Duncan Thaw grows up in the historical Glasgow of the 1940s and 1950s. When Lanark asks for information about his own past, a disembodied Oracle tells him Thaw's life story. The Oracle informs Lanark that Thaw:

> botched his end. It set no example, not even a bad one. He was unacceptable to the infinite bright blankness, the clarity without edge which only selfishness fears. It flung him back into a second-class railway carriage, creating you. (*L*, p.219)

However, like Bella and Victoria in *Poor Things*, while there are many parallels between Thaw and Lanark, there are also many inconsistencies. It is not clear that Lanark and Thaw are the same person, since they have different characters, ambitions and fates.

Thaw may or may not have killed himself at the end of Book 2. It is never explained if Lanark is his ghost, a new incarnation of Thaw in another dimension, or if the link is ever more than literary juxtaposition. The novel stresses the ambiguity of the arrangement. When Lanark eventually meets his 'author,'

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[53] Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia', p.152.

Nastler, Nastler explains that 'you are Thaw with the neurotic imagination trimmed off and built into the fabric of the world you occupy' (*L*, p.493). However, this comment is footnoted by a fictional 'editor,' who counters that 'the plots of the Thaw and Lanark sections are independent of each other and cemented by typographical contrivances rather than formal necessity' (p.493).

Although Lanark demands to know his past, he does not seem to relate personally to Thaw. Lanark proceeds to act in his own world without reference to Thaw's life or world. But there are links between Lanark and Thaw and their universes, and the account of Thaw's life changes its readers. They then read the increasingly fantastic Book 4 of *Lanark*, and reassess Book 3, with reference to ordinary life in the twentieth century. They also consider Thaw's life with reference to Lanark's life.

Gray describes *Lanark* as a 'blend of science fiction and realism' with the science fiction sections showing 'people and places you know exaggerated to the level of the grotesque and the exotic'.[54] Bruce Charlton argues that *Lanark* works 'through the allegorical indentification between the fantasy world and the real world. The allegory also extends to satirical exaggeration and objectification; [...] abstract tendencies are concretised in the text to form actual structures'.[55] The conditions of Thaw's world are intensified in Lanark's, where 'metaphor [...] becomes literal'.[56] Social problems are expressed as skin diseases, and the quantum credit card links time and money where 'the energy to pay for [goods] would be deducted from your future' (*L*, p.437).

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[54] Alasdair Gray, in Douglas Gifford, 'Private Confessions and Public Satire in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray', *Chapman*, 50-51, 10:1 & 2 (Summer 1987), 101-116 (p.111).
[55] Bruce Charlton, 'The World Must Become Quite Another: Politics in the Novels of Alasdair Gray', *Cencrastus*, 31 (Autumn 1988), 39-41 (p.39).
[56] Alison Lee, *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.102.

Richard Todd suggests that Books 3 and 4 'offer a continuation *and* a mirroring of the "earlier" books' and 'the world of Unthank and Provan bears a nightmarish relation to the deprived topography of Thaw's Glasgow'.[57] Todd argues that:

> although we may speak of duplication, the entire structure of the text, in which the Thaw narrative [...] is impacted within Lanark's, militates against a purely cyclic, duplicative reading, and in this way forces us to hold such a reading in an uneasy equilibrium as we attempt to balance it against the arguable legitimacy of a linear reading. (pp.127-28)

Todd finds the repetitions counter-balanced by the progression of events in *Lanark*. However, Cairns Craig views the relationship between the cyclical and linear movements in the text as unbalanced, with the cyclical nature of *Lanark* being considerably more sinister and powerful.

When Lanark and his girlfriend, Rima, try to leave the Institute for Unthank they have to cross an Intercalendrical Zone, where time and space are subjective experiences. They appear to be travelling in circles for a large part of their journey:

> Their apparent forward motion has only brought them again to the same place, insisting that the force of repetition, which underlies everything in both the realistic and the fantasy sections of *Lanark*, is more powerful than the dynamics of change.[58]

Craig sees the linear elements in *Lanark* as illusions covering the deeper cyclical nature of the narrative.

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[57] Richard Todd, 'The Intrusive Author in British Postmodernist Fiction: The Cases of Alasdair Gray and Martin Amis', in *Exploring Postmodernism*, ed. by Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema, Utrecht Publications in General and Comparative Literature, 23 (Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins, 1987), pp.123-37 (p.126).

[58] Cairns Craig, 'Going Down to Hell is Easy: *Lanark*, Realism and the Limits of the Imagination', in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, ed. by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp.90-107 (p.98).

There are many examples of duplication in *Lanark*. Not only is Lanark another version of Thaw, but both Unthank and Provan are alternative versions of Glasgow. Even within Lanark's world repetition is common. Characters constantly change their titles and functions. Craig argues that this is an expression of 'the endless rotation of the machine to which humanity is tied' and 'a fragmentation of humanity as dehumanising as the repetitions that it enforces on the worker and that turns him or her into a robot'.[59] Craig sees the Lanark sections not only as 'a repetition of and a commentary upon Thaw's life in time and history' but also 'as an effort to release Thaw from the dead-end world in which he has been trapped'.[60]

Cyclical movement in *Lanark* is not the positive, natural cycle of birth and death, but the negative, inhuman eternity of modern mechanisation. This is a highly bleak reading of the novel, which has more in common with Thaw's paranoia and Lanark's self-centredness than with the thrust of the whole narrative. Both main characters demonstrate the alienation of society through exaggeration. They stand out in their worlds as more sensitive to the injustices, but consequently they cannot appreciate ordinary pleasures or relate to other people. The novel tends towards a bleak view of humanity, but has a less pessimistic conclusion.

Lanark's spiritual alienation is dramatised by his physical illness, dragonhide. Professor Ozenfant, explains the origins of dragonhide:

> The heat made by a body should move easily through it, overflowing [...] in acts of generosity and self-preservation. But many people are afraid of the cold and try to keep more heat than they give, they stop the heat from leaving th[r]ough an organ or limb, and the stopped heat forges the surface into hard insulating armour [...] But no heat [gets] in! And since men feel the heat they receive more than the heat they create the armour makes the remaining human parts feel colder. [...]

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[59] Craig, *Arts*, p.99.
[60] Cairns Craig, 'Going Down to Hell is Easy: Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*', *Cencrastus*, 6 (Autumn 1981), 19-21 (p.20).

> [T]hey convert more and more of themselves into armour when they should surrender or retreat. [...] [T]hen the mouth shuts, the heat has no outlet, it increases inside him until ... [he explodes] (*L*, p.68)

Dragonhide is just one of several diseases treated in the Institute. However, Dr Munro, tells Lanark that 'problems take many forms but they're all caused by the same error' (p.63). All of the illnesses are physical representations of the alienation caused by the political and economic system. The inhuman mechanisation of this society is so profoundly alienating that people are destroying themselves through their inability to relate to one another.

Even after Lanark is physically cured, he is reluctant to become a doctor because:

> 'I am afraid! [...] You want to mix me with someone else's despair, and I hate despair! I want to be free, and freedom is freedom from other people!'
> Ozenfant [...] said 'A very dragonish sentiment! But you are no longer a dragon. It is time you learned a new sentiment.' (p.70)

Lanark can only cure his girlfriend, Rima, with an act of suicidal generosity. Both Lanark and Rima have difficulty forging relationships with people. They leave the Institute together and have a child, but still cannot relate to each other, accusing each other of being unable to love. Even when they hear the Oracle describe the past, they have wildly different recollections of the experience. Lanark hears the story of Thaw, but Rima seems to hear the story of Thaw's girlfriend, Marjory (p.357).

Isobel Murray and Bob Tait suggest that 'in their experiences and in their perceptions of their lives *past and present* [Rima] and Lanark only sometimes intersect and in important respects they cannot share experiences'.[61] This implies

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[61] Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, 'Alasdair Gray: *Lanark*', *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), pp.219-39 (p.231).

that the characters in *Lanark* 'including the "author", are doomed to live in somewhat lonely, solipsistic worlds substantially different from each other. That is no joke'.[62] Their isolation is very serious; however, there are other characters, both in the realistic and fantastic sections who try to love others. Thaw's parents make many sacrifices to support him, and at the end of the novel, Lanark's son Alexander not only protects him, but bands together with others to overthrow the system.

Craig sees the key to the structure of *Lanark* lying in its realist sections. George Lukács considered Social Realism to be the only appropriate literary form to examine society with, in order to reshape it. Craig suggests that this approach has not proved entirely successful:

> In British working class literature [...] and even more so in Scottish, realism has been the medium of the passive. It may have a political relevance in uncovering the concealed, neglected, unacknowledged aspects of society, but its characters [...] are necessarily defined by the conditions in which they are shown to exist: they become a function of their environment.[63]

Instead of providing imaginative material that stoked the demand for change, in Craig's view, social realism could only recreate the patterns that had created social injustices, demonstrating that change is impossible.

Craig sees working-class literature as unable to create positive visions of material change, nor even limited visions of escaping out of the materialistic trap:

> the major working class novels of the '50s and '60s all end in the defeat of the hero — not a tragic defeat asserting positive values, but a miserable submission to living with the inevitable, not a critical realism that enforces the demand for change, but a reluctant realism that can see no way out. [...] The novel's realism is equally an

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[62] Murray and Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels*, p.231.
[63] Craig, *Cencrastus*, pp.20-21.

> acceptance of the inevitable limitations of the working class environment.[64].

But not all working-class fiction saw their purpose to suggest alternatives, or pretend that everyone could escape their trap.

Many working-class novels, such as *No Mean City*,[65] were representations of the brutalising forces at work on the poor, often ignored by those better off. Novels could not change the situation, but they could express the concerns of the marginalised, and highlight their problems, informing society and perhaps precipitating change. Other works, such as John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*, John Braine's *Room at the Top*, and Alan Sillitoes's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*,[66] were all concerned with destroying the sort of fatalistic pessimism that Cairns theorises. These working-class heroes took on the Establishment and refused passively to submit to it, no matter what, in texts that had wit as well as politics.

Craig sees *Lanark* as a major innovation in working-class literature 'for what the enclosing of the "realistic" narrative of Thaw's life in Glasgow by the allegory of Lanark's life reveals is some of the fundamental limitations of the realist mode'.[67] *Lanark* highlights the current problems of realism by producing both a realistic narrative of overwhelming defeat, and a fantastic narrative that contains aspects of imagination and possibility. Realism is no longer seen as the only way of addressing social concerns, and is now, perhaps unjustly, associated with the Establishment forces that it once attacked.

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[64] Craig, *Cencrastus*, p.21.
[65] Alexander A. McArthur and H. Kingsley Long, *No Mean City* (London: Corgi, 1984, (1957)).
[66] John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (London: Faber, 1957); John Braine, *Room at the Top* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957); and Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, (London: Allen, 1958).
[67] Craig, *Cencrastus*, p.20.

Salman Rushdie expresses the characteristic Postmodern distrust of social realism. He suggests that fantastic magic realism and science fiction have succeeded realism because:

> in the twentieth century realism, reality has become very, very surrealist, it has become a very extreme, disrupted thing about which no two people can agree. [...] There's no longer a consensus, and social realism is the form that arose out of a consensus about reality that doesn't exist any more.[68]

Postmodern fictions try to reflect the complex, uncertain and fractured world, and feel that they cannot do so using the unifying perspective of realism. However, blanket Postmodern attacks on realism over-simplify and demonise the form.

Melvyn Bragg pointed out to Rushdie that:

> Social realism, when it started was a radical form [...] it didn't come out of consensus, it came out of its harsh beginnings. [...] [It] was a radical attack on a consensus. So social realism had its moment and may still again have its moment of being a fairly radical view.[69]

Rushdie's analysis of realism conflates the radical origins of the form with its conservative use. While realism originally attacked the Establishment, the non-radical and those who supported the status quo also adopted it. It continues to be the general form of popular entertainment in literature, and especially film and television. Consequently, art that is more challenging tends to attack the form that has been associated with the status quo, as well as its message.

Rushdie's attack on realism is not an entirely accurate description of the form, but demonstrates the antagonistic Postmodern reception of realism, whose meaning has changed with time and practice. *Lanark* also attacks the conservative perception of realism, not its original intentions, and uses fantasy to demonstrate many competing perspectives.

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[68] Salman Rushdie, in Melvyn Bragg, *Start the Week*, BBC Radio 4, 19 December 1994.
[69] Melvyn Bragg, *Start the Week*, BBC Radio 4, 19 December, 1994.

Craig describes the fantasy chapters in *Lanark* as allowing Gray to construct:

> an allegory, in the opening book of the novel, of the psychological damage the industrial city does to its inhabitants, a damage which involves a fundamental repression of their imaginative abilities, and [...] in the closing book, a political allegory that uncovers the sources of the city's condition in the whole pattern of the world economy. In the realistic sections of the novel we are trapped, with the characters, within the frame of realism's ability to document the world it depicts: it cannot allow itself to challenge that world because it only knows it within the terms of the given.[70]

It is perhaps more appropriate to consider the realist sections of *Lanark* not as describing the trap of working-class life, but the neurosis of a middle-class artist who will not conform to expectations or authority. Thaw's parents are neither rich nor poor, and expect him to become part of the professional classes, not a worker.

Thaw can escape from the grind of work by going to art school. But Craig contentiously argues that the life of an artist is one 'which will allow one to eat and, more importantly, allow one a kind of imaginative life, but only at the cost of ignoring the real suffering by which it is surrounded' (p.20). Thaw's imagination, not his circumstances, will not let him join an elite, wrecks his education, and leads him to illness and despair. His less sensitive friend, Robert Coulter, manages to move from dull industrial work to journalism.

The industrial city is seen, through Thaw's eyes, to be a place 'in which that which can be imagined cannot be fulfilled and that which is enacted cannot fulfil the imagination'.[71] Thaw points out that people do not notice that Glasgow is a 'magnificent' city 'because nobody imagines living here' (*L*, p.243). Other cities have been immortalised in history and the arts, so nobody feels like a stranger

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[70] Craig, *Cencrastus*, p.21.
[71] Ibid., p.21.

when they visit them. However, 'if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively'(*L*, p.243).

In Thaw's view, Glasgow is merely a collection of industrial and domestic arenas to its citizens, who, 'when our imagination needs exercise' imagine other cities and times, 'anywhere but here and now' (p.243). However, Thaw does not paint Glasgow to give it imaginative life, but to fill the void in his existence. It is the novel *Lanark* that attempts to give Glasgow an imaginative life.

Craig argues that what *Lanark*'s distinctive mixture of fantasy and realism reveals:

> is not merely the need for us to imagine the city if we are to live in full consciousness of it, it is that we need to make it real to ourselves in imagination if we are to realise the possibility of changing it. Only through imaginative apprehension can we give ourselves power over the terms of our existence, see our way beyond the limits of our 'reality'.[72]

Lanark uses realism to create a hysterical vision of the conditions of industrial deprivation, and then the fantasy elements give the imagination freedom to expand and to imagine change. Craig's thesis finally fails to discredit realism, but it does demonstrate a current distrust of realism's ability fully to convey Postmodern concerns.

The disproportionate amount of analysis devoted to the fantasy chapters of *Lanark* demonstrates this current disillusionment with realism. Christopher Whyte suggests that this is because the fantasy is more important to readers:

> a paradox of *Lanark* (and one explanation of its power) is that the grim science fiction of the outer books evokes Glasgow, before its current transformation, more accurately and more poignantly than any realism could do. (What would be the point of fantastic narratives if we did not feel ourselves to be living in them much of the time?)[73]

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[72] Craig, *Cencrastus*, p.21.
[73] Whyte, 'Not a Mirror', p.1.

Murray and Tait also concentrate on the fantasy sections because of the 'intricacies packed into these Books' and because Thaw's life seems 'more straightforward'.[74] Books 1 and 2 function not as an independent and equal narratives but create 'an indispensable dimension to add to the world, the experiences and the perceptions of both Lanark and Rima' (p.222) in Books 3 and 4.

However, Gifford argues that 'Books One and Two are *not* total realism'.[75] Todd also agrees that Thaw's story 'looks at first very much like a *Bildungsroman* [...] before gradually attaining more nightmarish and fantastic dimensions than anything to be found in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*'.[76] As Thaw grows up and his mental and physical state deteriorates his vision of the world also disintegrates.

At first, Thaw's art reflects his frustration with the limits of his imagination and world. He constantly tries to reproduce images that encompass a total picture of the world, and always fails. He creates a series of works that challenge perspective and ways of envisaging the world. Thaw 'is clearly not one who believes in the Realist reading position'.[77] But he is always disappointed since he can never satisfactorily produce those new perspectives.

As art constantly fails to satisfy Thaw, his personal life also frustrates him and his mind collapses. The chronology of the narrative is linear, but it begins to move in unpredictable steps, covering his art-school career in varying degrees of detail.

In the last two chapters of Book 2, Thaw's mental state is reflected in the

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[74] Murray and Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels*, p.222.
[75] Gifford, *Chapman*, 50-51, p.112.
[76] Todd, 'Intrusive Author', p.125.
[77] Lee, *Realism and Power*, p.109.

deterioration of the realism of the narrative. During dream-like passages, Thaw does not know if he is dreaming, hallucinating, or really killing someone.

As the Oracle admits, Thaw's Realistic narrative seems to 'set no example, not even a bad one' (*L*, p.218) to the Postmodern present, because he gives up, and makes no contribution or emotional connection with others. These books are almost a parody of working-class social realism with their exaggerated despair, misery and the inescapable trap of life in an industrial city. Thaw's narrative is designed to highlight the inadequacy of self-conscious fatalism in the face of industrial alienation and the current disillusionment with realism.

Thaw is finally crushed by his own limiting imagination. His sections masquerade as straightforward realism, but on closer examination it could be argued that they are almost as fantastic and unrealistic as the framing books. *Lanark* also frames Thaw's narrative within fantasy to provide a more expansive and liberating vision of the world, which may not be available in a purely realist narrative.

The realist Thaw sections are necessary to confront readers with the connections being drawn between Lanark's and the readers' worlds within the fantasy sections. While Murray and Tait see the Thaw books as only adding to Lanark's story, it is at least plausible to argue that without Thaw's sections Lanark's life would have a considerably less significant context.

Lanark, like Thaw, is constantly trapped in his circumstances, but unlike Thaw, he is ignorant of the limitations of his world and stubbornly refuses to accept the boundaries he constantly confronts. Both Thaw and Lanark:

> discover that they live in a nightmare world in which every escape route that they take leads straight into the maw of another monstrous head on the hydra of a system in which one is either the exploiter or

> the exploited, in which one is almost inevitably both at the same time.[78]

In Lanark's world, the traps are much more obvious. The Institute houses the intellectual and scientific elites, who survive by literally consuming those without power. The elites work with the governing Council and the terrifying business and industrial forces personified as the 'creature' (*L*, p.546).

These organisations 'represent scientific and technocratic plus political plus economic forces dominating life on the planet. By implication they have been the hidden powers circumscribing the life and times of Duncan Thaw'.[79] Lanark's fantastic life is not an escapist fantasy, but a deeper nightmare of the destructive power of the industrial society.

Craig believes the cyclical nature of *Lanark* reflects that Thaw and Lanark 'live in a society which has lost its historical significance, has entered into a kind of historical entropy in which there is no longer any forward momentum'.[80] Craig conceptualises the problem of history in *Lanark* as a struggle between the failure of society to impose Enlightenment notions of progress on experience and the eternal circle of non-history.

Craig feels that the 'conflict between realism as history-inscribed-on-the-world and a world where history has apparently been negated is dramatised in *Lanark* in the conflict between father and son' (p.94). Mr Thaw is a firm believer in Socialism and progress, despite his experience of the meaningless carnage of the First World War. However, Thaw 'suffers the post-Second World War world as a

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[78] Craig, *Arts*, p.94.
[79] Murray and Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels*, p.222.
[80] Craig, *Arts*, p.103.

wound of history failed'.[81] Thaw describes history as 'an infinitely diseased worm without head or tail, beginning or end' (*L*, p.160).

Craig suggests that *Lanark* attempts to resolve the dilemma of history by adopting a dual format:

> The double perspective, of the view from the kitchen window, and the view from the mountain top, from within the trudge of history and from a perspective that is outside of it, is the foundation of the generic doubling of the novel. Neither perspective will suffice by itself – only the dialectical interaction of the two will allow us to live with the unendurable weight of a history that we still have to believe may go somewhere.[82]

Craig feels that *Lanark* holds the failure of traditional history in balance with the horror of an eternal, inhuman present. 'We must be inside and outside at the same time: we must live in history and yet with the consciousness of being outside it' (p.104).

Craig also feels that the 'imaginary' Lanark has 'redeemed the real' Thaw (p.105), and saved him from the endless cycle of insignificance:

> Out of a continual defeat [...] comes a kind of success, for by the end of the novel Lanark is no longer a striver after a place in the elite, a creator of hells for others to live in; he is neither a striver after the ultimate ends of history nor after the imagination leaping to transcend the actual: he is one of us, between heaven and hell, a survivor of the tyranny of our historical imaginations, waiting the end. (p.106)

Characters in *Lanark* certainly use history as a justification for injustices and cruelty.

Professor Ozenfant, becomes Lord Monboddo, the leader of the council, and describes the future path of the industrial-political-intellectual elite. He claims that:

> There are no villains in history. Pessimists point to Attila and Tamerlane, but these active men liquidated unprofitable states which

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[81] Craig, *Arts*, p.95.
[82] Ibid., pp.103-104.

> *needed* a destroyer to release their assets. Wherever wealth has been used for mere self-maintenance it has always inspired vigorous people to grasp and fling it into the service of that onrushing history which the modern state commands. (*L*, p.542)

Monboddo's speech is a justification for the exploitation of the majority for the benefit of the elite. He is one of the 'grave, "straightforward" gentlemen who built the modern City' and 'continues to discipline the play of history with missionary certainty and zeal into well-made fictions'.[83] Monboddo creates a traditional, historical narrative to force the world into his totalitarian vision.

Both Lanark and Thaw protest about the way that history is used and abused. But Craig's theory that *Lanark* holds history and non-history in a double perspective does not seem to address the ambiguities of the text. While both Thaw and Lanark are offered traditional visions of history, and are told that their economic circumstances cannot be challenged, both stubbornly reject these views. Thaw cannot accept the simplistic and positive vision of his father when confronted with the grim reality of life. Lanark also rejects Monboddo's apparently inevitable programme because he is passionately worried about his family. The text also challenges Enlightenment history.

The realist narrative is suspended uncomfortably within *Lanark*, and its recollection through a disembodied Oracle does not permit either Lanark or the readers to connect it smoothly to the fantasy narrative. The text allows Lanark, and the readers, to hear about a past time from which they are totally divorced. It also demonstrates that this older realist form of historical narrative and way of organising memory is unavailable to both Lanark and the readers. This is possibly

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[83] Spanos, *Repetitions*, p.45.

a reason why many critics dwell on the events of Lanark's life, which seem more pertinent to the present, Postmodern moment.

The fantasy chapters of *Lanark* present a surreal allegory of the eternal present, where time has become subjective. Clocks are redundant, until a measurement of time is imposed for political manipulation. History is seen to be the servant of the elite, perverted and unavailable for use against them. The alienation of the realist sections from the rest of the novel reinforces the impression that history is irrelevant now. But simultaneously, and paradoxically, Thaw's narrative also acts as the sort of positive historical context that appears to have vanished from the Postmodern world. Despite being a relic from an earlier era, Thaw's story regains the ability to spark significant ideas and themes, if only through its interaction with the fantasy sections.

Lanark does not escape his economic circumstances, nor does he discover a new form of positive history. But he does briefly manage to challenge the totalitarian use of history by the elite by interrupting Monboddo's speech. Lanark also experiences aspects of existence that transcend the appalling logic of the system, such as his moment of happiness and connection with his son. He does remain fundamentally a man of the present, selfish and unable to relate to other people.

There has been considerable discussion as to whether *Lanark* ends positively or negatively. Lanark does not achieve much and finally prepares to die, a 'slightly worried, ordinary old man but glad to see the light in the sky' (*L*, p.560). Craig suggests that 'Lanark, too, fails in the end — or in his end — but that end sends us back to the beginning, the beginning of the whole world of *Lanark*'.[84]

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[84] Craig, *Cencrastus*, p.21.

Murray and Tait also feel that 'in our end is our beginning'[85] and suggest that Lanark's death:

> cannot be reduced to anything as simple and empty as despair. No more than Chris Guthrie's end on the Barmekin does it offer much by way of hope for the future or consolation for the past. But while Monboddo can unfeelingly submit himself to whatever happens, Lanark evidently cannot do so. (p.237)[86]

While Craig seems to suggest that a more positive natural cycle has been replaced by mechanised eternity, Murray and Tait find comfort in the continuity of life after Lanark's death, and in his unending rebelliousness.

However, there is no immediate sensation that Lanark's 'end sends us back to the beginning,'[87] either to Lanark's first period in Unthank or Thaw's childhood. Rather, this final end seems to imply that Lanark and Thaw have been released from their endless repetitions. Lanark has not failed; he has fulfilled his personal quests, finding both sunlight and the love of his son.

Nastler, the 'author', tells Lanark that 'the Thaw narrative shows a man dying because he is bad at loving. It is enclosed by your narrative which shows civilization collapsing for the same reason' (*L*, p.484). Nastler intends to end his tale 'catastrophically' (p.484), because if he produces a happy ending 'nobody who knows a thing about life or politics will believe me for a minute' (p.492). But the tale does not end this way. Nastler admits that although, as an author he used to be part of God 'I went bad and was excreted. [...] Creation festers in me. I am

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[85] Murray and Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels*, p.238.
[86] This is a reference to the final moments of Lewis Grassic Gibbons's novel, *Grey Granite* (1934), where the central character, Chris Guthrie, seems to die while contemplating her life and the view from the top of a mountain. *Grey Granite* is the final book of the trilogy *A Scots Quair* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986, (1946)), following *Sunset Song* (1932) and *Cloud Howe* (1933).
[87] Craig, *Cencrastus*, p.21.

excreting you and your world at the present moment' (*L*, p.481). Nastler is no longer an omnipotent narrator, and his creation begins to take on a life of its own.

Nastler's interview with Lanark is apparently written long before the chapters that surround it. Consequently Nastler does not know the details of Lanark's recent life, and is surprised to discover that Lanark has a son, Alexander. Alexander represents the greatest human connection that Lanark makes, since fatherhood gives Lanark a reason for living. Nastler is as limited as any other human being, and admits that his vision will not stretch beyond the boundaries of his own universe and its direction. If he cannot imagine his world changing for the better, he cannot write such an ending, but *Lanark* addresses this problem.

Nastler has not even imagined Alexander, because his birth is not possible in ordinary time. But Alexander is born because time is fantastic and speeded-up in the Intercalendrical Zone and remains fast in Unthank. He represents the power of the imagination, and is a catalyst for change. But *Lanark* can only partially represent this change. At the end of Book 4, Alexander is part of an army of working men, who are fighting to preserve Unthank from liquidation by the creature, Institute and Council. Alexander explains to Lanark that 'The world is only improved by people who do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied' (p.554). *Lanark* ends without showing any of this struggle, but, in the Epilogue, four chapters before the conclusion of the novel, there are some clues about the outcome of this fight.

Surrounding Nastler's conversation with Lanark is the Index of Plagiarisms (pp.485-99), which give a pseudo-academic over-view of the literary sources of the novel. The Index makes many references to living Glaswegian authors, which concern Chapters 45 to 50, but *Lanark* ends with Chapter 44. These references

vaguely describe a great cosmic battle, in which Alexander plays a leading role, where the workers defeat the forces of the establishment, and possibly God Himself, leading to 'the final descent to healthy commonplace' (*L*, p.499). Gray describes these non-existent references as:

> trying to conceive the chapters that didn't exist [...] representing the notion of a kind of social odyssey which somehow culminates in a utopian happy conclusion for everybody [...] in which a decent socialism is re-established everywhere. It's a kind of slightly different version of the author explaining the happy ending he is certainly not going to write because nobody believes in the possibility of this at all. It's this business of putting in, in a more fragmentary state, another ending.[88]

Lanark addresses our inability to imagine Utopia by highlighting the premise that dystopias are no more realistic. Lanark claims that 'these banal world destructions prove nothing but the impoverished minds of those who can think of nothing better' (*L*, p.497). Nastler loses control of his creation and the world does not end. Instead, the sun rises in a blaze of colours and reveals the beauty and spaciousness of the world. If Lanark is dying and cannot hope, others can. Proving that the vision of the elite is too limited opens the possibility of change. Alexander's continuation of the tale after the close of the novel is a sideways attempt to imagine Utopia, without presenting a flawed vision of it.

Lanark demonstrates that dystopias are also places where the boundaries of society's imagination are to be found, and challenged. Dystopian catastrophes are not necessarily negative portrayals of the Postmodern society. Jameson points out that images of destruction demonstrate that, like Lanark, Postmodern citizens have a fear 'of proletarianization, [...] of losing [...] a set of privileges which we tend increasingly to think of in spatial terms: privacy'.[89]

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[88] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, pp.21-22.
[89] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.286.

Catastrophic fiction, like disaster movies, can be read as a celebration of Postmodern society, rather than as a doom-laden warning, because 'this is precisely how postmodern technology consumes and celebrates itself'.[90] Jameson suggests that a disingenuous cynicism in Postmodern society has replaced Modernist celebration of machinery. We can convincingly create images of our own destruction, and those images provoke us to recognise the value of what we currently possess and might lose.

Lanark rejects this celebration of society, by creating expectations of dystopia and then frustrating them. Murray and Tait suggest that:

> a key to the fascination and attraction exercised by *Lanark* lies in the contrast—the ironical and paradoxical contrast—between the starkness of much of its content and the vitality of the creative performance. [...] [Gray's] great trick, arguably, is to conjure up defiant pyrotechnics as evidence of an undefeated capacity for delight and illumination on the very edge of the abyss.[91]

However, *Lanark*'s power lies in more than generating excitement through threats of disaster, as this would become a celebration of, or distraction from, the abyss. The text challenges the very presence of the abyss by its imaginative freedom in finding alternatives to the doomsday scenarios that Monboddo, Nastler and the readers think are inevitable.

The fantastic and grotesque portrayal of the nightmare of modern society gives *Lanark* most of its energy, but the crux of the novel lies in scenes of ordinary and domestic joy. Fantasy distracts readers from their own reluctance to consider the commonplace deprivations of contemporary industrial cities. Nastler suggests to Lanark that:

> Perhaps an illusionist's main job is to exhaust his restless audience by a show of marvellously convincing squabbles until they see the simple

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[90] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.385.
[91] Murray and Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels*, p.222.

> things we really depend upon: the movement of shadow round a globe turning in space, the corruption of life on its way to death and the spurt of love by which it throws a new life clear. Perhaps the best thing I could do is write a story in which adjectives like *commonplace* and *ordinary* have the significance which *glorious* and *divine* carried in earlier centuries. (*L*, p.494)

It is revealing that many critics hunt for positive messages in Lanark's death, but seem to overlook the amazing arrival of sunlight. The sunrise changes every perception, reveals that Unthank has not been destroyed, and fills the world with colour. The novel ends with Lanark 'glad to see the light in the sky' (p.560).

Through the mixture of fantasy and realism *Lanark* demonstrates that history has lost its traditional power. But, in pointing out the changes in our perception of history, the text reanimates something of an historical perspective. By challenging conventional wisdom, which seeks to impose itself in an increasingly violent manner, with fantasy, the novel also attempts to create a new sense of change, and thus to open-up the possibilities of the future once again. The fantastic sections of *Lanark* might have stood as a novel in themselves. But the addition of the realistic sections intensified aspects of contemporary society and added an appropriately complex historical perspective to the Postmodern present.

THE FAILURE OF WHIMSY IN *GRIMUS*

Salman Rushdie's only science fiction novel, *Grimus*,[92] on the other hand, is not nearly as successful, in literary or commercial terms, as either *A History Maker* or *Lanark*. Rushdie admits that his first novel 'to put it mildly, bombed' (*IH*, p.1). *Grimus*'s greatest problem was not that as a Postmodern novel it broke

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92 Salman Rushdie, *Grimus* (London: Paladin, Grafton, 1989, (1975)). References hereafter to *G* in the text.

traditional literary rules, but that it was totally alienated from its readers, hardly related to any lived experience.

Grimus is the 'only book [that Rushdie has] written which had its source in another book, a twelfth-century Sufi narrative poem called *The Conference of the Birds*,'[93] by the Persian poet, Farid ud-Din 'Attar. In the poem, thirty birds, led by a hoopoe, go on a spiritual journey, to find a god, Simurg, on top of a mountain. When the birds arrive, they do not find the god. However, 'Simurg' also means 'thirty birds', and the journey has purified the birds so that they merge to become the god themselves.

Rushdie suggests that 'although the plot of *Grimus* is not that of the poem, it has it at its centre. [...] I was trying to make a theme out of eastern philosophy or mythology and transpose it into a western convention, and I think it didn't really work'.[94] The transposition of eastern ideas into the western novel fails because the resulting narrative is not a mixture of cultures but loses all ties to experience.

A mysterious pedlar, Grimus, an anagram of Simurg, gives the central character, Flapping Eagle, immortality. Flapping Eagle is a Native American whose tribe rejects and expels him. Consequently, he rejects his own past and drifts aimlessly through the centuries. Flapping Eagle:

> was Chameleon, changeling, all things to all men and nothing to any man [...] filling the empty hours of the hollow days of the vacant years. Contentment without contents, achievement without goal. [...] Stripped of his past, [...] forsaking the ways of his ancestors for those of the places he drifted to, forsaking any hope of ideals in the face of the changing and contradictory ideals he encountered, he lived, doing what he was given to do, thinking what he was instructed to think, [...] and doing it so skilfully [...] that the men he encountered thought he was thus of his own free will and liked him for it. (*G*, pp.31-32)

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[93] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.245.
[94] Ibid., p.245.

However, despite all Flapping Eagle's adventures and experiences 'after a while, he realized he had learnt nothing at all. [...] He lived the same physiological day over and over again. His body: an empire on which there was no sun to set' (*G*, p.33). The one purpose that all these wanderings gives Flapping Eagle is that he discovers that 'I want to grow old. Not to die: to grow old' (p.33). Immortality becomes a continuous present when time is rendered meaningless by the removal of radical personal change, ageing and death.

At this point Flapping Eagle is directed into a new dimension that Grimus has created, to a place called Calf Island. Here all the inhabitants are trapped in their immortality and 'the horror is that life goes on'.[95] In order to survive a serious flaw in the dimension the people must also distract themselves with mind-numbing repetitions. Flapping Eagle tries to fit in, but seems to have lost his previous knack of effortlessly adapting to the society he finds himself in. He inadvertently disrupts the delicate balance of the island. This provokes the crisis that Grimus has carefully planned from the beginning.

Grimus wants to create his own 'minutely-planned and satisfying death. An aesthetic passing on' (*G*, p.232) since death 'is what life is about' (p.231). Grimus wants to give his life meaning by controlling his own end and thus making it significant. Grimus also wants to trick Flapping Eagle into merging. While one of their collective bodies dies, an aspect of Grimus's mind will survive to appreciate the significance of the event, and to direct Flapping Eagle's consciousness, as his successor.

This plan succeeds to an extent, but Flapping Eagle prevents Grimus from dominating their surviving collective mind, and directs the stone rose, the source

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[95] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.246.

of Grimus's power, to remove itself from their dimension. What is left of Grimus protests that dimensions 'exist only in conjunction with one another, as functions of one another. Destroy the Rose, and you destroy our link with the Dimension-continua. We cannot survive that' (*G*, pp.250-51).

Flapping Eagle has finally learnt to relate to other people, so rejects Grimus's desire for abstract learning and eternal power, and does not listen. The removal of their power source results in the disintegration of the dimension:

> Deprived of its connection with a relative Dimensions, the world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself, its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primordial, unmade energy. The raw material of being was claiming its own. (p.253)

Grimus seems to end as a plea for connections, to other worlds and other people, and a rejection of the eternal present, but this appears as an after-thought.

William Walsh considers that *Grimus* represents all the worst excesses of Postmodern fiction. If humanity, according to T.S. Eliot in one of *Grimus*'s epigrams, 'cannot bear very much reality',[96] then Walsh feels that 'the purpose of *Grimus* is to ensure that the reader is not obliged to bear any'.[97] Walsh attacks the novel for being a 'mishmash' of fairy-tale and contemporary material (p.119). He feels that it aims to burst through the conventional boundaries of language and concepts 'to an anarchic and repetitive universe' (p.120). However, according to Walsh, 'what it does burst through to is the adolescent mysticism with which the novel concludes' (p.120).

Walsh feels that Rushdie's work 'is broad, grand in its sweep and extravagantly inventive – a flood, as James puts it – but deficient in stream,

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[96] T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', in 'Four Quartets', *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, rev. edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1963, (1936)), pp.189-95 (p.190). Epigram, *Grimus*, p.7.
[97] William Walsh, 'The Succession: From Khushwant Singh to Salman Rushdie', *Indian Literature in English* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1990), pp.98-124 (p.119).

impulsion and control. At least the stream is compromised by the flood in *Grimus*'.[98] Walsh criticises *Grimus* for not conforming to the standards of realism. However, *Grimus* is a direct attack on realism, and criticising it for not being realist seems inappropriate. It is more constructive to judge *Grimus* on its own terms, for its creation of a persuasive, heteropian Postmodern universe.

The majority of the novel is an examination of the effect of stagnant eternity on human nature, a parallel project to Grimus's own study of the inhabitants on the island. Grimus takes away the conditions that drive people, by creating a universe without scarcity or the need to work. He also removes the ability and desire of the islanders to reproduce by making them sterile and immortal. He believes that these unnatural conditions necessitate 'a profound change in human behaviour, a change which I believed would reveal our true natures far more exactly' (*G*, p.232). Despite these claims, there is no clear evidence in the text that such an alienated existence does reveal anything unexpected about human nature.

Urgency is constantly dissipated in the narrative, with Flapping Eagle and his companions starting on quests several times, but quickly abandoning them for various forms of stasis. Walsh suggests that the narrative in *Shame* is also delayed by authorial intervention, when he felt that it needed 'as much inward compulsion as possible'.[99] It is only in the last two chapters of the novel that Flapping Eagle is driven to the top of the mountain to confront Grimus.

Lanark is a self-conscious attempt to express and deal with the dreadful sense of the loss of history in Postmodern society, by mixing realism and fantasy. But *Grimus* does not go beyond an unmotivated expression of the loss of historicity.

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[98] Walsh, *Indian Literature*, p.123.
[99] Ibid., p.123.

The concluding sections seem imposed on the rest of the narrative, and are too brief to seriously challenge the dominance of the eternal present in the novel.

What Rushdie 'didn't like' about *Grimus* was:

> that it seemed too easy to use a fantasy that didn't grow out of the real world, a kind of whimsy. I don't even really like the word fantasy as a description of that kind of non-naturalistic material in my books, because fantasy seems to contain that idea of whimsy and randomness, whereas I now think of it as a method of producing intensified images of reality – images which have their roots in observable, verifiable fact. [...] I do think that one thing that is valuable in fiction is to find techniques for making actuality more intense, so that you experience it more intensely in the writing than you do outside the writing.[100]

The fantastic elements of Rushdie's later work are attempts to experience reality more intensely; producing the ever-elusive present through heightened representations.

Haffenden asked Rushdie if his contention that 'any intensification should not become sheerly fantastic' means that 'it must have some political or social context to which it is the response?'.[101] Rushdie replied:

> Yes, I think so. [Fantasy] has to come out of something real, and in that sense I had to reject certain things about the way *Grimus* was written. I had to re-examine everything I had thought about writing and put it back together another way.[102]

James Harrison detects a lack of 'sheer linguistic exuberance' and temporal and narratorial 'discontinuities and inconsistencies'[103] in *Grimus*. He feels that '*Grimus* reveals an equal timidity [...] in its use of fantasy' (p.34). The fantasy and the realistic elements in *Grimus* are overly literary. Rushdie draws on Sufi myths, novels, word games, historical sources and science fiction such as *Brave*

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100 Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.246.
101 John Haffenden, 'Salman Rushdie', *Novelists in Interview*, (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.231-61 (p.246).
102 Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.246.
103 James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie* (New York: Twayne, 1992), p.33.

New World[104] to create Calf Island and its inhabitants. But he does not draw on his own experiences, or the religions, histories, politics and culture of India, Pakistan or Britain, to produce either the fantastic or realistic elements of *Grimus*.

By using straightforward science fiction in *Grimus* 'the pretense is maintained that everything is explicable along conventionally rational lines'.[105] But when Rushdie moved on to magical realism in his later novels, his 'fictional world openly and matter-of-factly acknowledges the unmatter-of-fact to be a part of any vision of the world he shares with his readers' (pp.34-35). Harrison suggests that this is related to Gabriel García Márquez's work. There, 'no matter how hard the madness of magic struggles to keep pace, it still falls short of the insanity that realism has always managed to mask behind the straightest of straight faces' (p.35).

The almost exclusively literary concerns of *Grimus* result in the presentation of the themes and narratives being too abstract and alienated from the experience of the readers. The characters are all one-dimensional and exist in an artificial world freed from all the ordinary concerns of life. They exist only as part of two literary experiments, one Grimus's and one Rushdie's.

This distance between the readers and the text unwittingly enhances the readers' experience of Postmodern alienation, but only through the failure of the novel to engage with those readers and consciously to tackle the experience of contemporary society. The perpetual present of *Grimus* is in any case one of stagnation not that of continual Postmodern change. *Grimus*'s universe is too

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[104] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, intro. by David Bradshaw (London: Flamingo, 1994, (1932)).
[105] Harrison, *Salman Rushdie*, p.34.

calm, too limited, and too rational to connect adequately with our world and experiences.

However, Rushdie's next novel, *Midnight's Children*, does confront the failures of *Grimus*, not by abandoning fantasy, but by altering it. Rushdie continues to address literary ideas but turns away from science fiction and the future-without-a-future of *Grimus*, towards a new form of history. Haffenden considers that in *Midnight's Children*, 'Rushdie "went for broke" in reclaiming India for himself in his "great, encapsulating" comic epic'.[106] Instead of rejecting his roots, as Flapping Eagle attempts, Rushdie returns to his own childhood in Bombay to draw inspiration for a novel about an alternative personal and public history.

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN AS HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

Midnight's Children, is a fantastical historical epic, concerning the founding of the modern states of India and Pakistan. Rather than creating a disconnected fantasy, *Midnight's Children* draws its fantasy from Indian and Western culture and mythology, and places it in the context of modern India. The novel intertwines fantasy with the historical elements of the text in order to highlight the weaknesses of traditional history and to create an imaginative truth.

Feminist theories have contributed to Postmodern debates by questioning the distinction between the public and the private. Hutcheon agrees that 'if the personal is the political, then the traditional separation between private and public history must be rethought'.[107] The consequences of this rethinking 'is to render

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[106] Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.231.
[107] Hutcheon, *Politics*, p.160.

inextricable the public and historical and the private and biographical'.[108] Traditional history attempted to exclude personal experiences through the convention of objectivity. *Midnight's Children* subjectively mixes family histories with public events to challenge traditional historical and literary forms and examine the impact of the personal and the public upon each other.

The authorial character, Saleem Sinai, appears to be inextricably and personally linked to India's public and secret histories:

> I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: [...] August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too: [...] at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. [...] [T]hanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously hand-cuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicos ratified my authenticity. I was left entirely without a say in the matter. I Saleem Sinai [...] had become heavily embroiled in Fate – at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement. (*MC*, p.9)

Having been born at the very moment of Indian independence, Saleem is celebrated as a living symbol of the new nation. A letter from Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister, informs Saleem that 'you are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest of attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own' (p.122).

Saleem does not invent the idea that he is inescapably linked to India; however he extends the connection beyond the human-interest angle or propaganda value of the accident of his birth. He portrays aspects of his and his family's private lives as causing and reflecting public events. He claims that 'I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our

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[108] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.94.

(admirably modern) scientists might term "modes of connection". [...] I was inextricably entwined with my world' (*MC*, p.238).

Saleem discovers that he is one of the 1001 Children of Midnight, who all have unique, magical gifts due to the historic moment of their births. He eventually suggests that the Emergency, with all its mass repression and atrocities, was created as a front to disguise Mrs Gandhi's destruction of the Midnight's Children and their potential for change. Saleem attempts to depict himself as the central character in India's history, connected to everything, because his life has been a series of disconnections, marginalising him even within his own family.

Saleem is his parent's favourite child but this changes when he misunderstands his gift of telepathy and blasphemously announces that Archangels are talking to him. His father hits him so hard that Saleem falls through a green-glass tabletop:

> having been certain of myself for the first time in my life, I was plunged into a green, glass-cloudy world filled with cutting edges, a world in which I could no longer tell the people who mattered most about the going-ons inside my head; green shards lacerated my hands as I entered that swirling universe in which I was doomed, until it was far too late, to be plagued by constant doubts about what I was *for*. (p.165)

Saleem's life changes at this moment, and he enters a new and violent world. He discovers that people do not believe his vision of reality and he is never again entirely free from uncertainty.

Saleem intertwines official history with fantastic elements, muddles facts and fiction, and confuses events, times and stories. He justifies his strange autobiography by his rapidly approaching death:

> Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out. [...] I have no hope of saving my life, nor can I count on having even a thousand nights and a night. I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning – yes, meaning – something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity. (p.9)

The fantastic history of *Midnight's Children* is Saleem's attempt to make sense out of his short and disappointing life.

Hutcheon describes certain examples of Postmodern fiction, including *Midnight's Children*, as 'historiographic metafiction'.[109] This description includes 'those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' (p.5). She sees historiographic metafiction as a special sub-set of Postmodern literature.

Hutcheon characterises Postmodern literature as a 'complicitous critique'[110] of Postmodern society, challenging social structures from within that society. She argues that all previously secure ground for legitimation and representation 'is first inscribed and subsequently subverted' in Postmodernism.[111] Historiographic metafiction's 'theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past' (p.5).

Historiographic metafiction inscribes and then subverts traditional historical and realist literary conventions such as 'representation and the transparency of language, the unitary subject, unmediated access to the historical referent itself, and so on'.[112] McHale suggests that historiographic metafiction perfectly meets 'the criteria of serious ironic parody, historical reference, and double coding' which Hutcheon defines as the basic elements of Postmodern architecture and literature (p.20).

Hutcheon highlights the importance of literary history within historiographic metafiction. Postmodern texts overtly create intertextual references specifically to

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109 Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.ix.
110 Hutcheon, *Politics*, p.2.
111 Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.92.
112 McHale, 'Anxiety of Master Narratives', p.20.

renegotiate their relationship with older styles and works of literature, as well as to renegotiate the present's general relationship with the past. Hutcheon considers, for instance, that the relationship between E.L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime* and one of its literary antecedents, John Dos Passos's *USA*[113] is an important feature of the text. Because '*Ragtime* derives its power as much from how it *recalls* as from how it *inverts* Dos Passos's work'.[114]

Poor Things reminds Postmodern readers of the imagination and range of nineteenth-century literature, while rewriting it to address contemporary issues. *Midnight's Children* uses its intertexts to dramatise that the present grows out of the past. Rushdie 'didn't consciously think of a single writer as a model'.[115] But when he realised that *Tristram Shandy* 'had gone before me [...] I did little bits of stylistic underlining, to make sure people knew that I knew' (p.250). *Midnight's Children* explores many issues tackled by previous texts, and acknowledges its connections with its antecedents.

Hutcheon believes that historiographic metafiction is a specifically Postmodern phenomenon, as it challenges the authority of both traditional history and realist fiction in order to revitalise contemporary concepts of history and literature. However, she acknowledges that Modernist literature has already challenged these concepts:

> was history not already overtly problematized in [...] the 'metahistorical novel'[116] – *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Orlando*,[117] and so on [...]? Well, yes and no: paradoxical postmodernism is both oedipally oppositional and filially faithful to modernism. The provisional,

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113 John Roderigo Dos Passos, *USA* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976, (1938)); trilogy comprising *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), *The Big Money* (1936).
114 Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.92.
115 Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.250.
116 Barbara Foley, 'The Modernist Documentary Novel', *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (London: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp.185-232 (p.195).
117 William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Vintage, 1995, (1936)); and Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, ed. by Brenda Lyons, intro. by Sandra M. Gilbert (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1993, (1928)).

> indeterminate nature of historical knowledge is certainly not a discovery of postmodernism. Nor is the questioning of the ontological and epistemological status of historical 'fact' or the distrust of seeming neutrality and objectivity of recounting. But the concentration of these problematizations in postmodern art is not something we can ignore.[118]

Hutcheon appears to be arguing that the difference between the Modernist and Postmodernist challenges to history and realism is quantitative rather than qualitative.

But there is more to Postmodern historiographic metafiction than overwhelming quantity. The pressures of the century that provoked the Modernists' disquiet over history have intensified. Issues about the relationship of history and literature to society have not been neutralised by Modernism's concentration on art. Large-scale abuses of historical methods in the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century have forced writers to confront these issues again. The crisis of history also throws the relationship of the present to the past into serious question.

Historical issues are now being tackled in more aggressive fashions, and historiographic metafiction represents a far greater challenge to official history than Hutcheon suggests. Postmodern texts are not merely indulging in philosophical debates to disabuse their readers of harmless but out-of-date notions. Instead, these texts are fighting what they perceive as dangerous and fundamental tendencies towards the abuse of power, official lies, repression and manipulation of society.

Modernist works generally consider art an antidote to the horrors of history. Even Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, which creates the fantastic history of an artistic aristocrat, is a demonstrably Modernist rather than a Postmodernist work. *Orlando*

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[118] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.88.

is considerably less interested in self-consciously confronting society with contemporary problems of alienation and uncertainty through history, than in using the passage of history as the context for the creation, celebration and examination of literature.

Orlando focuses on the writing of a single poem, and the different literary institutions and styles that develop through the ages. While Orlando lives with Turkish gypsies they become suspicious of her because she is interested in beauty and art, rather than in living. They feel that:

> here is someone who doubts; [...] here is someone who does not do the thing for the sake of doing; not looks for looking's sake; here is someone who believes neither in sheep-skin nor basket; but sees [...] something else.[119]

Orlando's interest in art separates her from her contented, practical friends because it demonstrates that she is more interested in lofty, abstract ideas than other people. Postmodern texts do not present art as a refuge from history, or as separate from it, but as an engagement with history. Nor do they focus on art rather than history. Instead, Postmodern fiction tends to blend interest in art with interest in the world.

Salman Rushdie's novels *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and Alasdair Gray's novels *Poor Things*, *Something Leather* and *1989 Janine*, all tackle literature's changing relationship with history. Traditional historical novels, such as Sir Walter Scott's fiction, operated in the grey areas surrounding historical events and people. Fiction fleshed out the dry skeleton of recorded facts with possible emotions, motivations and dramatic details to turn history into fictionalised lives. Historical fiction complemented Enlightenment

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[119] Woolf, *Orlando*, p.103.

history rather than challenged it. Postmodern texts return to the field of historical literature with quite different perspectives on progress, change and history.

Hutcheon believes that Postmodern literature challenges traditional history in order to reassess the present's relationship with the past. Historiographic metafiction 'reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in doing so, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge'.[120] According to Hutcheon, what is now at issue 'is less the problem of how to narrate time than the issue of the nature and status of our information about the past that makes postmodern history, theory, and art share certain concerns' (p.90).

Rushdie also emphasises the importance of historical context. He has criticised the wave of Western novels, television series and films about the British Raj in the early 1980s, arguing:

> that works of art, even works of entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum; and that the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history. For every text, a context. (*IH*, p.92)

Literature and art are still organically connected to society, politics and history. Rushdie believes that 'the rise of Raj revisionism [...] is the artistic counterpart of the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain'. And no matter how innocently the writers and filmmakers work they 'run the grave risk of helping to shore up the conservatism, by offering it the fictional glamour which its reality so grievously lacks' (p.92).

Only another sort of artistic historical construction can challenge this sort of disingenuous, revisionist history. After *Grimus*, which concentrated upon the eternal, dislocated present, Rushdie's fiction attempted to create an alternative

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[120] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.89.

vision of history. In his next novel, *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai, a Muslim from Bombay, records sixty-three years of magical personal, family and Indian history.

According to Hutcheon historiographic metafiction, such as *Midnight's Children*, focuses on the distance of the historical referent from any present understanding:

> Postmodernism returns to confront the problematic nature of the past as an object of knowledge for us in the present. There is no abyssal infinite regress to absence or utter groundlessness. [...] The past really did exist. The question is: *how* can we know that past today – and *what* can we know of it?[121]

Midnight's Children is a highly subjective, historical record that highlights its dubious construction through its inability to grasp the past.

The distant past is only remembered in the images and texts though which it has been recorded. Hutcheon points out that both fiction and history:

> unavoidably construct as they textualize that past. The 'real' referent of their language once existed; but it is only accessible to us today in textualized form: documents, eye-witness accounts, archives. The past is 'archaeologized'[122] [...], but its reservoir of available materials is always acknowledged as a textualized one.[123]

Rather than neutrally relating intrinsic narratives, history, like literature, creates narratives and meanings by manipulating records of events and images of experiences:

> history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past. [...] In other words, the meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'. (p.89)

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[121] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.92.
[122] Gérard-Georges Lemaire, 'Le Spectre du Post-Modernism', *Le Monde Diamanche*, 18 October 1981, p.xiv.
[123] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.93.

Enlightenment History was believed to be the unmediated, objective record of events that make up a linear and progressive structure. It was considered 'accessible as pure fact, independent of individual perception, ideology, or the process of selection necessitated simply be creating a written narrative'.[124] But if facts are created not fixed, Doctorow feels 'that the nonfictive premise of a discoverable factual world is in itself a convention no less hoary than Cervantes' Arab historian'.[125]

Doctorow, whose novels Hutcheon also includes in her category of historiographic metafiction, strongly disputes the idea that history could ever truly capture 'truth':

> Consider those occasions—criminal trials in courts of law—when society arranges with all its investigative apparatus to apprehend factual reality. Using the tested rules of evidence and the accrued wisdom of our systems of laws, we determine the guilt or innocence of defendants and come to judgment. Yet the most important trials in our history, those which reverberate in our lives and have most meaning for our future, are those in which the judgment is called into question. [...] Facts are buried, exhumed, deposed, contradicted, recanted. There is a decision by the jury and, when the historical and prejudicial context of the decision is examined, a subsequent judgment by history. And the trial shimmers forever with just that perplexing ambiguity characteristic of a true novel. ... (p.160)

Even with the full weight of empirical reasoning, society cannot be altogether certain that it has established the truth. Doctorow bases one of his most powerful books, *The Book of Daniel*,[126] on the controversial trial of the Rosenbergs, who were executed for passing nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union.

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[124] Lee, *Realism and Power*, p.29.
[125] E.L. Doctorow, 'False Documents', *Poets and Presidents: Selected Essays, 1977 – 1992* (London: Macmillan, 1994, (1993)), pp.151-64 (p.159). Orig. pub. *New American Review*, 26 (November 1977) and since revised.
[126] E.L. Doctorow, *The Book of Daniel* (Picador, Pan: London, 1982, (1971)).

Doctorow quotes Nietzsche's thesis that 'for a fact to exist we must first introduce meaning'.[127] Morality intervenes in the creation of facts in history and law, and 'no judgment does not carry the passion of the judge'.[128] Doctorow suggests that 'there is no history except as it is composed. There are no failed revolutions, only lawless conspiracies' (p.160).

Rather than believing that history informs the present about the perspectives of the past, Doctorow agrees with those historians who hold that 'all history is contemporary history. [...] That is why history has to be written and rewritten from one generation to another' (pp.160-61). The raw material of history is constantly fashioned into meaningful facts and rearranged. Instead of the traditional focus on the truth of history, Doctorow highlights the inescapable human mediation through language that produces history.

Facts are not found but created out of language:

> What is a historical fact? A spent shell? A bombed-out building? A pile of shoes? A victory parade? A long march? Once it has been suffered it maintains itself in the mind of witness or victim, and if it is to reach anyone else it is transmitted in words or on film and it becomes an image, which, with other images, constitutes a judgment. (p.161)

Doctorow admits that there are 'some facts, for example, the systematic murder by the Nazis and their client states of six million men, women, and children, are so indisputably monstrous as to seem to stand alone' (p.161). But the great man-made famine of 1959-1961, which killed 20-50 million Chinese people, is virtually unknown in the west. It hardly exists in our historical memory, as if it never happened.

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[127] 'There are no "facts-in-themselves," for a sense must always be projected into them before they can be "facts"', Friedrich Nietzsche, Note 556, *The Will To Power*, ed. and commentary by Walter Kaufmann, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), p.301-02 (p.301). Orig. pub. (Germany: 1906, (1901)). Version in Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.160.
[128] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.160.

Doctorow makes the literary observation that 'facts are the images of history, just as images are the facts of fiction'.[129] History uses narrative techniques to create its facts, and in the process constructs and imposes meanings. Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and other Poststructuralists have also highlighted the linguistic construction of historical narratives. But Doctorow notes that 'the people most sceptical of history as a nonfictive discipline are the historians themselves' (p.161).

Historians such as Hayden White have reconsidered the conventions and assumptions of their discipline. Not only was history considered the direct record of facts, but also this was complimented by a belief that '"reality" is not only perceivable but is also coherent in its structure'.[130] Historical events were considered inherently meaningful; however, White argues that:

> Historical situations are not inherently tragic, comic, or romantic. They may all be inherently ironic, but they need not be emplotted that way. [...] How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot-structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation.[131]

White focuses on the selection process that is a necessary part of the construction of history or any narrative, and uses this process to reveal the human fallibility of history writing.

Matching a plot-structure to events may not be a conscious act, but the result of looking at historical events with a view to finding previously established patterns.

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[129] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.161.
[130] Hayden White, 'The Fictions of Factual Representation', in *The Literature of Fact: Selected Papers From the English Institute*, ed. by Angus Fletcher (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp.21-44 (p.22).
[131] Hayden White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artefact', in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. by Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 41-62 (p.48).

By making historians aware of the processes involved in shaping historical narratives, White attempts to enable them to move away from increasingly inadequate traditional patterns of thought, freeing them to make new forms of observations.

History then, despite its claimed empirical basis, is another field of narrative literature. Non-fiction has 'even brought a kind of exhaustion to the dramatic modes by the incessant exploitation of them'.[132] Doctorow suggests that:

> history is a kind of fiction in which we live and hope to survive, and fiction is a kind of speculative history, perhaps a superhistory, by which the available data for the composition are seen to be greater and more various in their sources than the historian supposes. (p.162)

As literature and history continue to change, Postmodern literature can exploit contemporary history in new ways, while exploring many more areas.

Doctorow argues further that:

> Fiction is a not entirely rational means of discourse. It gives to the reader something more than information. Complex understandings, indirect, intuitive, and nonverbal, arise from the words of the story, and by a ritual transaction between reader and writer, instructive emotion is generated in the reader from the illusion of suffering an experience not his own. (p.151)

Fiction has a greater range of interests and sources than history, or other non-fictive discourses. Doctorow insists that history is 'dulled' (p.159) in order to gain its authority and that all non-fiction discourses 'restrict some human energy and imprison it' (p.164). Fiction is free to explore every aspect of experience.

Doctorow has written many novels that not only confuse facts and fiction, but also re-write the historical record. He justifies his irreverent uses of history with the claim that:

> at issue is the human mind, which has to be shocked, seduced, or otherwise provoked out of its habitual stupor. [...] Moral values are

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[132] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.162.

> inescapably aesthetic. In the modern world it is the moral regime of factual reality that impinges on the provinces of art.[133]

Since historians use dramatic techniques, novels can exploit this relationship. Texts can abuse our residual knowledge of history to provoke readers into new considerations of both literature and history.

If 'moral values are inescapably aesthetic' (p.162), as Doctorow suggests, then aesthetic works and judgements can, and do, have moral dimensions. Where history once claimed to be unmediated, literature can demonstrate it to be wholly and unavoidably mediated, and therefore as suspect and open to abuse as any other shaping human discourse.

Saleem tries to write an authoritative historical record, but his efforts are constantly frustrated. *Midnight's Children* was born out of an autobiographical impulse, but transforms this to explore the creation of personal identity through the manipulation of memories. An old photograph of the Bombay home of Rushdie's family contradicts an idea about the past expressed in L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*:

> 'The past is a foreign country,' goes the famous opening sentence [...] 'they do things differently there.'[134] But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time. (*IH*, p.9)

Rather than feeling disconnected from the past and at home in the present, Rushdie suggests that we are unable to make contact with the chaotic and uncertain present because we have lost our familiar past.

Rushdie argues that:

> the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true;

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[133] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.162.
[134] L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1999, (1953)), p.9.

> but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. (*IH*, p.12)

Rushdie finds his dislocating experience of migration acting as a foundation for his fiction, multiplying Postmodern anxieties many times, and dramatising them in a concrete form.

However, it is not necessary to become a migrant to experience the profound uncertainty of the Postmodern condition. Alasdair Gray was born in Glasgow and has lived and worked there for most of his life, surrounded by his family and community. Yet, he too writes fiction that displays a sense of dislocation in a present that seems out of control, and demonstrates an urge to reclaim something of the lost Glasgow of his youth.

While writing *Midnight's Children* far away from tropical Bombay in temperate London, Rushdie was 'constantly plagued' (*IH*, p.10) by his inability to accurately recreate his childhood:

> until I felt obliged to face it in the text, to make clear that (in spite of my original and I suppose somewhat Proustian ambition to unlock the gates of lost time so that the past reappeared as it actually had been, unaffected by the distortions of memory) what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honourable and suspect. (p.10)

Rushdie is forced to admit that he cannot recreate his actual lost country or past, only create his own imaginative experience of those places and times. *Midnight's Children* deals with the events of the past, but has become a story about the nature of memory. It examines people's inability to remember and record accurately or objectively.

Saleem's narration of objective history is shown to be suspect; not only does he weave surreal fantasy into his historical account, but he makes chronological and

factual mistakes. Rushdie suggests that these 'are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary' (*IH*, p.10). Rushdie feels that while trying to write about India from outside it and 'reflect that world', he is 'obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost' (p.11). The broken mirrors are his childhood memories, but 'there is a paradox here. The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed' (p.11).

Rushdie argues that 'the shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities' (p.12). Memory invests great significance in objects and events that were once familiar. They are removed from their prosaic sphere and come to represent something much larger, the past that no longer exists. However, Rushdie also claims that 'the broken glass is not merely a mirror of nostalgia. It is also, I believe, a useful tool with which to work in the present' (p.12).

Rushdie argues that is important to describe the partial nature of memory because this reveals that:

> human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death. (p.12)

Midnight's Children uses an exploration of memory to expose human frailties and the constructed, unreliable nature of the history, ideas and certainties upon which we build our lives.

Saleem makes many errors in his narration. He makes an error about the legend of the Hindu god Ganesha, and immediately afterwards he boasts about his knowledge of Hindu culture (*MC*, p.149). This mistake might be missed by non-Indian readers; however, Saleem foregrounds another error:

> I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time. (p.166)

The text uses Saleem's mistakes about Ganesha and Gandhi's assassination as 'a way of deflating that narratorial pomposity; but it was also [...] a way of telling the reader to maintain a healthy distrust' (*IH*, p.25). It also highlights the fallibility of memory.

The sign-posted mistakes, along with the many fantastic elements in the story, make it clear that *Midnight's Children* 'is far from being an authoritative guide to the history of post-independence India' (*IH*, pp.22-23). However:

> the book's success [...] initially distorted the way in which it was read. Many readers wanted it to be the history [...] which it was never meant to be. [...] These variously disappointed readers were judging the book not as a novel, but as some sort of inadequate reference book or encyclopaedia. (p.25)

At first, *Midnight's Children* was mistaken for a dramatised history of India, when it was a dramatisation of the fictionalisation of India through writing history.

Rushdie explains that Saleem 'is not an oracle; he's only adopting a kind of oracular language. His story is not history, but it plays with historical shapes' (*IH*, p.25). Through the unreliable narration, the text attempts to show that 'history is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge' (p.25). *Midnight's Children* works to challenge the empirical authority of history by demonstrating its use of the

narrative techniques of fiction. Rushdie hopes that 'the reading of Saleem's unreliable narration might be, I believed, a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to "read" the world' (*IH*, p.25).

But Saleem's unreliability is not just the result of honest mistakes. Traditionally, unreliable narrators in fiction miss the point of their own narratives, but the novels left enough clues for readers to follow both the narrative and the sub-text. However 'the narrator of *Midnight's Children* is neither particularly stupid, nor particularly unaware of what's happening' (p.23). Saleem is not trying to record his memoirs humbly, he is fully conscious of his own mediation of history. *Midnight's Children* is interested in demonstrating 'the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool' (*IH*, p.24).

Saleem deliberately misrecords his own memories, as well as making mistakes. He:

> is no dispassionate, disinterested chronicler. He wants so to shape his material that the reader will be forced to concede his central role. He is cutting up history to suit himself, just as he did when he cut up newspapers to compose his earlier text, the anonymous note. [...] The small errors in the text can be read as clues [...] that Saleem is capable of distortions both great and small. (*IH*, p.24)

Near the end of the narrative, Saleem describes the murder of his archrival, Shiva.

But in the next chapter Saleem confesses:

> To tell the truth, I lied about Shiva's death. [...] [F]or the first time, I fell victim to the temptation of every autobiographer, to the illusion that since the past exists only in one's memories and the words which strive vainly to encapsulate them, it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred. (*MC*, p.443)

This is the only occasion when Saleem admits that he has deliberately lied in his narrative. While he suggests that it is an 'illusion' that the past exists only in memories and records, it is only because he confesses his distortion that readers

know that he lied. He reminds us that all history is vulnerable to the bias and agenda of historians.

Saleem tries to justify his self-conscious manipulation of history by comparing the processes of documenting history and making chutney; 'by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks' (*MC*, p.38). He has literally 'pickled [the] chapters' (p.459) of his memoirs.

Saleem claims to have an extraordinary sense of smell, and uses this to help him create new chutneys, his 'special blends' (p.459), containing his own 'memories, dreams, ideas' (p.460). But the connection between history and chutney is not just metaphorical in *Midnight's Children*; food plays an important role in expression of emotions and in connecting the present to the past in the novel. Childhood memories of tastes and smells are evocative of long-forgotten events, even leading to Saleem's reunion with his ayah, Mary.

Saleem claims that Indians 'are a nation of forgetters' (p.37), so he records his memories in words and pickles, so that he and the nation do not forget. As he nears the end of his book and his pickling, he declares that 'I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection' (p.459). He suggests that the transformation of fruit into chutney and events into history cannot occur without deliberate intervention and some unavoidable change.

Despite the inescapable distortions of preserving, Saleem hopes that:

> One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to the eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible

> to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth ... that they are, despite everything, acts of love. (*MC*, p.461)

Although many of the memories of India's history are unpleasant, the act of remembering is a positive one, reconnecting India to her entire past, and freeing the present and future from the dangers of ignorance.

While Saleem feels that remembering is an ultimately positive act, the readers have to decide whether Saleem's unreliable narrative has any value. It records memories that they cannot be certain about and that an obviously biased consciousness has mediated. But Saleem himself emphasises this dilemma. When he realises that he is making mistakes, he asks:

> Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything – to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? Today, in my confusion, I can't judge. I'll have to leave it to others. For me, there can be no going back; I must finish what I've started, even if, inevitably, what I finish turns out not to be what I began ... (p.166)

Saleem finds that he has no alternative other than to continue his increasingly flawed project, but reminds readers that they are the ultimate judges of his work and its value.

Saleem tried to write a masterly narrative, shaping his memories to give himself significance and centrality. His life and the writing of it both escape his control and deconstruct his ambitions. But despite recognising his lack of authority, he completes his memoirs. *Midnight's Children* emphasises that even when we are confronted by history's human fallibility, we have to acknowledge that we still need to construct our relationship with the past in order to understand our present.

HOMOEOPATHIC POSTMODERNISM

Saleem describes himself sitting 'like an empty pickle jar in a pool of Anglepoised light, visited by this vision of my grandfather sixty-three years ago, which demands to be recorded' (*MC*, p.19). The present process of constructing our relationship with the past concerns *Midnight's Children* as much as the written history produced. Although the text pretends to be a straightforward historical narrative, there is a parallel narrative taking place in the present. Saleem also records his current activity of remembering, and writing and the influence that his illiterate listener, Padma, has on his story.

Hutcheon asserts many times in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* that 'we only know of those past events through their discursive inscription, through their traces in the present' in historical and literary texts.[135] She argues that:

> The overt metafictionality of novels [...] acknowledges their own constructing, ordering, and selecting processes, but these are always shown to be historically determined acts. It puts into question, at the same time as it exploits, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real. (p.92)

Postmodern fiction demonstrates that writing history is an historical event, a process that alters through time, and is subject to the prejudice and manipulation of the historian. It is not objective or unmediated. This portrayal challenges moribund notions of history, while giving us another perception of historical change through the historicity of history.

Jameson also feels that in the Postmodern era we do not see the past directly. However, he does not believe that we have any historical consciousness left:

> this historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes 'pop history'). Cultural production is thereby driven back inside a mental space which is no longer that of

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[135] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.97.

> the old monadic subject but rather that of some degraded collective 'objective spirit': it can no longer gaze directly on some putative real world, at some reconstruction of a past history which was once itself a present; rather, as in Plato's cave, it must trace our mental images of that past upon its confining walls.[136]

Jameson argues that Postmodern fiction, such as Doctorow's *Ragtime*, attacks Postmodern ahistoricism, not older forms of history, using Postmodernism's own eclectic methods against it. He claims that Doctorow's work tries:

> To undo postmodernism homoeopathically by the methods of postmodernism: to work at dissolving the pastiche by using all the instruments of pastiche itself, to reconquer some genuine historical sense by using the instruments of what I have called substitutes for history.[137]

Where once historical novelists used historical references to discuss issues of their day, Jameson argues that *Ragtime* focuses on the inability of historical novels to bridge the gap between the present and the past.

Hutcheon believes that '*Ragtime*'s fragmented, iterative structure challenges the traditional realist narrative conventions of the inscription of the subject as coherent and continuous, suggesting perhaps that fragmentation and replication are also [...] conditions of subjectivity'.[138] But her reading of the novel as an attack on the Establishment subject, history and society through fragmentation unifies the formal and political tensions of the novel too neatly. Jameson believes that Hutcheon's reading 'does everything but the essential, lending the novel an admirable thematic coherence few readers can have experienced in parsing the lines of a verbal object held too close to the eyes to fall into these perspectives'.[139]

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[136] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.25.
[137] Jameson, in Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism', p.59.
[138] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.84.
[139] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.22.

Jameson describes Doctorow as 'the epic poet of the disappearance of the American radical past',[140] mourning, not celebrating the creation of apolitical, mass media, American society. Jameson holds that *Ragtime* 'not only resists interpretation, it is organized systematically and formally to short-circuit an older type of social and historical interpretation which it perpetually holds out and withdraws' (p.23).

Ragtime does comprise 'paralleled families' coping with the 'social demographics of urban America',[141] and three working-class men all achieving success in new media. But the form of the novel repels attempts to synthesise it into an integrated narrative and undermines suggestions of thematic unity. Jameson points out that:

> the objects of representation, ostensibly narrative characters, are incommensurable and, as it were, of incomparable substances, like oil and water - Houdini being a *historical* figure, Tateh a *fictional* one, and Coalhouse an *intertextual* one - something very difficult for an interpretive comparison of this kind to register.[142]

Unlike traditional historical novels, *Ragtime* does not make any effort to integrate its disparate characters. In fact, the novel highlights the different ontological status of various characters and imbues their relationships with added tensions.

Two of the families are fictional and obstinately known only by their social and biological relationships to one another. The third is the fragmented black family of Coalhouse Walker, an intertextual character, derived from Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*.[143] When the families interact with each other, further

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[140] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.24.
[141] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.61.
[142] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp.22-23.
[143] Heinrich von Kleist, *Michael Kohlhaas: From an Old Chronicle*, trans. by James Kirkup (London: Blackie, 1967). Orig. pub. (Germany: Tieck, 1810).

fictional and intertextual characters and especially the many historical figures who appear in the narrative, such as Harry Houdini, their different ontological natures resonate.

Jameson considers that the uneven mixture of historical characters with fictional family figures:

> operates powerfully and systematically to reify all these characters and to make it impossible for us to receive their representation without the prior interception of already acquired knowledge or doxa - something which lends the text an extraordinary sense of déjà vu and a peculiar familiarity one is tempted to associate with Freud's 'return of the repressed'[144] [...] rather than with any solid historiographic formation on the reader's part.[145]

Jameson argues that the text emphasises the isolation of the present from any genuine experience of and imaginative or organic relationship with the past. Instead, readers are forced to recognise that the story is a re-arrangement of our contemporary understandings of the period, thus highlighting our inability to experience anything other than the present.

Jameson considers that 'by turning the past into something which is obviously a black simulacrum [Doctorow] suddenly makes us realize that this is the only image of the past we have'.[146] *Ragtime* and other Postmodern novels demonstrate that we have lost our historical consciousness. They create a:

> negative dialectics, [...] an insistence of the very flatness and depthlessness of the thing which makes what isn't there very vivid. That is not negligible. It is not the reinvention of some sense of the past where one would fantasize about a healthier age of deeper historical sense: it is the use of those very limited instruments to show their limits. And it is not ironic. (p.62)

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[144] Sigmund Freud, 'Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)' (1911), *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey and others, standard edn., 25 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1958, (1925)), XII, pp.1-82 (p.68). Orig. pub. *Jahrbuch für Psychoanalytische und Psychopathologische Forschungen*, 3:1, 1911, Leipzig.

[145] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.24.

[146] Jameson, in Stephanson, 'Regarding Postmodernism,' p.62.

According to Jameson, by revealing the dislocation of the present, Doctorow simultaneously manages to give readers a sense of historical perspective by illustrating that this is what we have uniquely lost in the Postmodern era. The vivid absence revitalises a feeling that something has gone and changed.

Jameson exaggerates the waning of historical contents too greatly; as Doctorow argues, historians were never able to look 'directly' at the past, and we have not yet suffered a total breakdown of our historical imaginations. Hutcheon is right to suggest that historiographic metafiction not only attacks the ahistorical present but undermines traditional historical conventions. But Postmodern fiction does seem to use pastiche as a homeopathic method of distancing the present to revitalising some sense of historical consciousness for a time which is alienated from its past.

Midnight's Children uses Saleem's narrative about writing to dramatise the present's struggle to make sense of and contact with the past, rather than trying and failing to dramatise that past. The novel focuses upon the inability of the present to relate to the past in order to disorient the readers and so urge them into an understanding of our historical condition. It explores our ahistorical age to give it an historical context. It also demonstrates that we have not lost all sense of connection with the past and future, just one traditional perception, and that alternative histories are available.

Midnight's Children prevents readers from integrating Saleem's present and past narratives into one, seamless linear story. The narratives appear to occur simultaneously, in different dimensions, with parallel events. When Padma leaves Saleem, he loses his certainty about his narrative, just as his story is entering a period of great uncertainty.

Saleem's narrative is a record of moving from certainty to uncertainty in both the events of the past but also in the retelling of those events in the present. He was a privileged child, whose hopes and expectations were spectacularly frustrated and destroyed, and his role as historian of his life does not progress as he planned. Saleem seems to live his life three times over: in experience, before the novel starts; in his memories; and in the process of writing his autobiography.

Different styles distinguish the narratives. The historical sections contain many fantastic events and people, but no magic seems to happen in the present, although Saleem still claims to have a fabulous sense of smell. His personal age of fairy-tale, myth and magic is separate from our empirical present. No one now believes the literal truth of his story, and he is almost committed to a mental hospital.

As Saleem's narrative progresses, he discovers that:

> Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems – but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars' faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves – or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself *is* reality. (*MC*, pp.165-66)

As he moves towards the present he sees that the past only looks firm because it is distant enough to have acquired the appearance of a shape. Uncertainty characterises the present because we are immersed in it.

Saleem justifies his magical events by claiming that they are appropriate in an 'incredible' present, where reality is an 'illusion'. But the text uses the cinema metaphor to illustrate the uncertainty of the present. Rushdie argues that *Midnight's Children*, 'as it nears contemporary events, quite deliberately loses deep perspective, becomes more "partial". [...] I felt it would be dishonest to

pretend, when writing about the day before yesterday, that it was possible to see the whole picture' (*IH*, p.13).

Saleem's narrative never achieves self-effacing authority, because he constantly discusses the problems, motives, doubts and tendencies involved in writing history. He reminds readers that this is not direct history, because even he cannot reach his past directly, or see every aspect of it. However, *Midnight's Children* attempts to move beyond this observation of disconnection, to give Saleem a Postmodern connection to his past.

Saleem fights to distinguish his own story from those of everyone else. He discovers that:

> there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. (*MC*, p.9)

The American novelist Saul Bellow considers that any contemporary individual:

> feels the pressure of a vast public life, which may dwarf him as an individual while permitting him to be a giant in hatred or fantasy. [...] All the while he is aware of his lack of power, his inadequacy as a moralist, the nauseous pressure of the mass media and the weight of money and organisation, of cold war and racial brutalities. [...] [O]ne might say that public life drives private life into hiding. [...] Public turbulence is largely coercive, not positive. It puts us into a passive position. There is not much we can do about the crisis of international politics, the revolutions in Asia and Africa, the rise and transformation of the masses. Technical and political decisions, invisible powers, secrets which can be shared only by a small élite, render the private will helpless and lead the individual into curious forms of behaviour in the private sphere.[147]

Everyone feels isolated in empirical Western countries, because society tends to see mass grouping, not individuals. Part of the intensifying alienation of the twentieth century is the perception that no one person can influence events.

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[147] Saul Bellow, 'Some Notes on Recent American Fiction', *Encounter*, 21:5 (1963), 22-29 (p.23).

Bellow detects this increasing crisis of the formation and image of the Self in twentieth century literature. Saleem's self-identity is created out of the tensions between feeling individually connected with and anonymously overwhelmed by India.

Saleem's family and society shape his identity and life. As a result he feels that he 'must commence the business of remaking my life from the point at which it really began, some thirty-two years before anything [...] as *present*, as my clock-ridden, crime-stained birth' (*MC*, p.10). Saleem starts his memoirs with story of his grandparents and their family. This gives his life a family context, a sense of perspective, continuity and connection with the past. Once Saleem starts his story he finds 'there's no going back' (p.24). The forward motion of the story towards the present seems unstoppable.

Midnight's Children uses the relationship of Saleem the author and Padma his listener to dramatise society's power struggles between those who create powerful social narratives, and those whose lives are shaped by those narratives. Saleem and Padma are locked in a power struggle. Padma is used to traditional, Indian, oral story telling, and finds Saleem's narrative full of unwelcome innovations. He finds her 'bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next' (p.38). At first, Saleem seems to have ultimate control over the narrative, because he is the one who already knows 'what-happened-next' and chooses what to write. Padma's role as listener limits her; she is unable to do anything but react to what Saleem chooses to tell her.

Padma is a very demanding listener, though, and indirectly exercises power over the story through her relationship with Saleem. He seeks meaning and control, but he has no command over what Padma believes. Consequently, he

attempts to assert himself by exploiting her trust in his sincerity. She listens in good faith, but he misleads her about his parents, eventually revealing that he is not biologically connected to his family. Padma is furious: '"All the time," Padma wails angrily, "you tricked me"' (*MC*, p.118). Saleem took her interest and conviction in his narrative for granted and deliberately abused them to create a climactic surprise and stamp his authority on his tale.

Saleem does not take Padma's negative reaction seriously enough, and she leaves him in a rage. He makes the mistake of claiming that he has become the 'master' of fragmentation and 'Padma is the one who is now under its spell [...] paralysed – yes! - by love' (p.121). Padma instantly proves that he is not her master by exercising the right of all listeners; she stops listening.

Saleem angrily finds himself 'alone, without my necessary ear, and it isn't enough' (p.149). He realises how much he has come to rely upon Padma's influence in the creation of his story:

> How to dispense with Padma? How give up her ignorance and superstition, necessary counterweights to my miracle-laden omniscience? How to do without her paradoxical earthiness of spirit, which keeps [...] my feet on the ground? I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present ... but must I now become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line? (p.150)

Saleem begins to imagine his tale as the bridge connecting his past to the present. Without his listener, who represents the present, and her interest in the progress of his narrative, Saleem begins to lose control of his text and confidence.

Saleem finds that he feels 'confused. Padma has not returned [...] and in her absence, my certainties are falling apart' (p.166). It is at this point that he discovers that he has started to make mistakes in his narrative. His quest for meaning is crumbling because he has lost the audience where he could see that

meaning taking shape. By writing into a vacuum he has no idea what his future audience will make of his history, admitting 'I, now, Padma-less, send these words into the darkness and am afraid of being disbelieved' (*MC*, p.167).

When Padma returns Saleem describes himself as 'balanced once more – the base of my isosceles triangle is secure. I hover at the apex, above present and past, and feel fluency returning to my pen' (p.194). After their confrontation Saleem follows Padma's reactions because he now realises that 'in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe' (pp.270-71). Padma and Saleem continue in a spirit of collaboration until the end of the novel, when Saleem's tale finally links the story of the past with that of the present through meeting Padma.

Saleem ends his dual past and present narratives by discussing the future:

> I shall have to write the future as I have written the past, to set it down with the absolute certainty of a prophet. But the future cannot be preserved in a jar. [...] [It] cannot be pickled, because it has not taken place. (p.462)

Unreliable Saleem prophesies his own death. Padma wants to marry him, to legitimise their relationship and to think of the future, but the connection between the author and reader must end with the narrative.

By the end of the novel, Saleem's narrative has changed. He complains that his narrative is not what he had planned:

> Scraps of memory: this is not how a climax should be written. A climax should surge towards its Himalayan peak; but I am left with shreds, and must jerk towards my crisis like a puppet with broken strings. This is not what I had planned; but perhaps the story you finish is never the one you begin. (p.426)

He started his narrative in charge, exercising great control over his description of his grandparents, describing himself as a 'puppeteer' (p.65), and ends it as a

victim, resembling the puppet. His lack of control over the events that shaped his life undermines his attempt to control the writing of his life.

Eventually Saleem comes to see a lack of certainty and control as a positive:

> It's a dangerous business to try and impose one's view of things on others.
>
> Padma: if you're a little uncertain of my reliability, well, a little uncertainty is no bad thing. Cocksure men do terrible deeds. Women, too. (*MC*, p.212)

Midnight's Children represents Mrs Gandhi as the incarnation of repressive certainty. Mrs Gandhi's agents destroy Saleem's future when they imprison, torture and finally castrate him, to extinguish his threatening metaphorical and magical potency.

This final humiliation teaches him:

> the lesson of No Escape; now, seated hunched over paper in a pool of Anglepoised light, I no longer want to be anything except what who I am. Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter. (p.383)

Saleem does not achieve his meaning by becoming successful and standing out from the crowd, or by controlling his own narrative. He becomes significant by being reduced to such a low point by his experience of life and narration that he can recognise the connections that shape everyone.

Saleem finds that 'the different parts of my somewhat complicated life refuse, with a wholly unreasonable obstinacy, to stay neatly in their separate compartments' (p.187). The meaning of Saleem's tale is to connect every aspect of his life together. But he achieves this only by acknowledging and using uncertainty and fragments, rather than imposing an artificial wholeness. Saleem describes a child growing into a being of infinite possibilities:

> What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia – even a whole language. (*MC*, p.100)

People are an encyclopaedia of their experiences, connections and potential.

Italo Calvino describes 'the contemporary novel as an encyclopedia, as a method of knowledge, and above all as a network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world'.[148] Calvino describes how the Italian novelist, Carlo Emilio Gadda:

> tried [...] to represent the world as a knot, a tangled skein of yarn; to represent it without in the least diminishing the inextricable complexity or, to put it better, the simultaneous presence of the most disparate elements that converge to determine any event. (p.106)

Gadda's work attempted to reconnect the disconnected world to itself, in all its diversity, not just to describe and celebrate that disconnection.

Calvino argues that 'the grand challenge for literature is to be capable of weaving together the various branches of knowledge, the various "codes," into a manifold and multifaceted vision of the world' (p.112). This quest for connection in disconnected Postmodern society could be seen as perverse or naïvely old-fashioned. But Calvino justifies the attempt by arguing, like Rushdie, that people are the sum total of everything they experience:

> Who are we [...] if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable. (p.124)

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[148] Italo Calvino, 'Multiplicity', *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, trans. by Patrick Creagh (London: Vintage, 1996, (1992)), pp.101-124 (p.105). Orig. pub. (Milan, Italy: Garzanti, 1988).

The exploration and reconnection of the Postmodern world is part of the exploration and reconnection of contemporary people; we may understand ourselves better by making some new sense of the present and our place in it.

Saleem has been a helpless victim of historical events. *Midnight's Children* uses Postmodern metafiction to dramatise his attempt to regain control of history and reconnect himself to the past by mediating and communicating his memories. Saleem tries to make sense of the past through writing history, but does so only through discovering uncertainty. The feeling that we can no longer believe Enlightenment metanarratives and are all at the mercy of alienating social, political and economic forces contributes to the sense of uncertainty at the end of the twentieth century. *Midnight's Children* presents readers with an attempt to become an active participant in the uncertain present, not a passive victim.

The novel does not offer a solution to the uncertainties of the present, but offers visions of trying to reconnect the present with the past that could generate many solutions in many circumstances. Instead of restating comforting illusions about the potential wholeness and unity of life, *Midnight's Children* aggressively deconstructs the Enlightenment metanarratives of linear history and progress. It revisits history through fantastic fiction, while also taking sides in current political debates by preserving memories of corruption and repression. The novel highlights uncertainty, but does not then make a virtue out of a necessity, simply celebrating it and the breakdown of the historical imagination.

Postmodern fiction homoeopathically explores the present and its uncertainty, in order to find new modes of connection with the past. Saleem attempts to find connections and shapes to give his life meaning, but fails to control and impose neat pre-ordained patterns upon his story. However, he does find shape and

meaning in the revelation that although the present is uncertain, at the same time everyone and everything is interconnected, and people do not have to abandon themselves to chaos.

Each one of us makes our own, unique set of connections with our own experiences, society and those around us. But through creating these connections, we discover that the present is not as dislocated as it sometimes seems. Rushdie argues that:

> Once upon a time you could have written novels in which the public world and the private world were discrete from one another [...] but it seems to me that one of the things we've learned about ourselves as a species is that we are very closely interconnected. [...] It's not just that public life affects private life, but separately lived private lives can affect each other quite fundamentally.[149]

By forging our personal webs of connection with the past and the present, we can begin to escape from the current paralysing fear of present and consider the future again.

SHAME: IMAGINATION VERSUS 'REALITY'

Salman Rushdie's next novel, *Shame*, is another example of historiographic metafiction, but it is a much more overt attack on the abuse of history by powerful elites. The novel concentrates on the political influence on history, by imagining the fantastic history of a country which 'is not Pakistan, or not quite' (*S*, p.29). It follows the domestic and political fortunes of two of the rulers of the country, their families, and the 'peripheral' (p.25) hero of the novel, Omar Khayyam. General Raza Hyder is loosely based on the then military dictator of Pakistan, General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq. Iskander Harappa is based on the civilian,

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[149] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.249.

democratically elected President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whom General Zia deposed and later executed.

Rushdie explains that he:

> didn't want to write a political allegory, though it's a political story: it's a book about the private life of the master race. In Pakistan the numbers of people who settle the fate of the nation are very small, so that it is a kind of domestic story about kitchen tyranny.[150]

The novel shows the human dimension within political circles, the petty jealousies, weaknesses, and passions that shape the destiny of the country and the fate of many other people. Rushdie concentrates on this human aspect to deny the myth that uncontrollable, inhuman force or divine fate drives politics. The rulers of this country are not presented as allegorical personifications of any grand destiny. By focusing on the personalities of the principal people, the novel shows their personal responsibility for the abuses during their terms in office.

However, the novel does not use Social Realism to demonstrate the hypocrisies and repressed memories of atrocities. It weaves a tale of many unexplained or impossible births, parallel fictional universes, supernatural demons, angels, ghosts, telepathy and a trio of monstrous mothers together with the political intrigues, corruption, military dictatorships and family dramas.

Doctorow argues that there are 'two kinds of power in language'.[151] The power of a news report 'residing in its manifest reference to the verifiable world—let us call that *the power of the regime'* (p.152). The power of a fictional 'description inhering in a private or ideal world that cannot be easily corroborated or verified—let us call that *the power of imagination'* (p.152). Doctorow admits that

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150 Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.254.
151 Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.152.

this is an extreme distinction, but justifies his claim with the dominance of empirical thought in Western society.

Doctorow explains that the power of the regime is:

> the modern consensus of sensibility that could be called *realism*, which [...] may be defined as the business of getting on and producing for ourselves what we construe as the satisfaction of our needs—and doing it with standards of measure.[152]

Doctorow, like Spanos, perceives the realist consensus as a system which is used to govern society, and 'anything which governs us must by necessity be self-interested and organized to continue itself. Therefore I have to conclude that the regime of facts is not from God but man-made, and, as such, infinitely violable' (p.153).

Many 'facts', previously considered inalienable, have turned out to be incorrect, such as the old view that the world was at the centre of the universe. But the world of facts also 'prescribes for us not only what we may like and dislike, believe and disbelieve, but also what we may be permitted to see and not to see' (p.153). Empirical thinking shapes the patterns by which society interprets the world. It is under these conditions that Doctorow feels 'there is a regime of language [non-fiction] that derives its strength from what we are supposed to be and a language of freedom [fiction] whose power consists in what we threaten to become' (p.153).

Doctorow believes that stories originally did not distinguish between fiction and non-fictional elements. Literature 'bound the present to the past' and 'helped to compose the community necessary for the continuing life of its members'

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[152] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.153.

(p.154). The decline in the importance of story telling 'means to [Doctorow] that literature is less a tool for survival than it once was'.[153]

As the novel form was established with *Don Quixote*, Walter Benjamin argues that it gave 'evidence of the profound perplexity of the living'.[154] Novelists, such as Daniel Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe*[155] and Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, responded to the authority of non-fiction and history by pretending that they were not creating fiction, but merely editing history. 'In the excellent phrase of Kenneth Rexroth, they adopt the convention of the "false document"'.[156]

Defoe based *Robinson Crusoe* on the true story of Alexander Selkirk, a famous castaway, traumatised by his experience. Defoe used Selkirk's story to produce a more idealised account, to describe 'what happens when an urban Englishman is removed from his environment and plunked down in nature. What happens is that he defines the national character'.[157]

Crusoe behaves as Englishmen believed that they ought to, and:

> there was an indwelling of the art in the real life; [...] there was an intravention, a mixing-up of the historic and the aesthetic, the real and the possibly real. And what was recovered was the state of wisdom that existed [:..] before fact and fiction became ontologically differentiated—that is, when it was possible for fiction to give counsel. (p.157)

Defoe overcomes the lack of authority in fiction by 'splitting himself in two, creator and documentarian, teller and listener, conspiring to pass on the collective

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153 Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.154.
154 Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Jonathon Cape, 1970, (1968)), pp.83-109 (p.87). Book orig. pub. (Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1955). Article orig. pub. *Orient und Okzident* (1936).
155 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1994, (1719)).
156 Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.155. Kenneth Rexroth, 'Moll Flanders', *With Eye and Ear* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp.11-20 (p.17).
157 Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.157.

wisdom in its own language, disguised in its own enlightened bias, that of the factual world'.[158]

The false document can be a successful strategy, with Robinson Crusoe's fiction all but obscuring Alexander Selkirk's history, but there are dangers in the technique for authors. Doctorow points out that 'to offer facts to the witness of the imagination and pretend they are real is to commit a kind of regressive heresy' (p.157). Fiction runs the risk that it will be attacked for confusing facts and fiction, misremembering history. Facts are presumed to be discovered, not invented 'and, like a religious tenet, the presumption is held more fiercely the more it is seen to be illusory' (p.157).

Novels reveal that facts are neither sacrosanct, nor inalienable. In the west, the empirical realm of facts ignores fiction, and literature is considered little more than a nuisance. But, in less democratic countries, a writer, especially one who confuses facts and fiction and challenges official history, 'has the power to do harm' (p.158):

> He is recognized to have discovered the secret the politician is born knowing: that good and evil are construed, that there is no outrage, no monstrousness that cannot be made reasonable and logical and virtuous, and no shining act that cannot be turned to disgrace—with language. (p.158)

Consequently, in many regimes writers are routinely criticised, censored, arrested and murdered.

Salman Rushdie, dealing with the volatile political cultures of the Sub-Continent, has had to face fierce criticism. Mrs Gandhi won a libel case over a passage in *Midnight's Children*, which reported a commonly held derogatory opinion about her family relationships. The Pakistani dictatorship banned *Shame*,

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158 Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.157.

due to its fantastical but unflinching attack on the corruption and brutality of a succession of Pakistani regimes. *Shame* also provoked outrage for basing Sufiya Zinobia, a symbol of bestial anger and political, personal and religious failure, on General Zia's own handicapped daughter, Zain.

Shame is a deliberately non-realist novel, siding with the fantastic against the empirical. It is not presented by an objective, omniscient narrator, as so often in realism, but is self-consciously created by its Narrator. The Narrator tells his readers that this 'fictional country exist[s], like myself, at a slight angle to reality' (*S*, p.29). The tale is about a fictionalised version of Pakistan, and the Narrator too occupies another fictionalised interpretation of Pakistan. He is also a fictional character, but occupies a different ontological level than the other characters, because his role is to intervene between the tale and the readers.

The Narrator frequently interrupts the tale to discuss literary, political or personal matters with the readers. Often he claims that years have passed while he has been speaking directly to the readers: 'let's get on. I've lost another seven years of my story' (p.145). But his interventions do not paper over the seams in the action of the story. Instead, they jerk the readers out of the flow of the narrative, and remind them that the story they are reading is mediated and controlled by a specific, opinionated person.

The Narrator breaks into his description of Bilquìs and Raza Hyder's migration to their new country during the Partition of India, to digress about the nature of literary realism, limited by its conventions:

> But suppose this were a realistic novel! Just think what else I might have to put in. [...] [H]ow awkward, dear reader, all this could turn out to be.
>
> How much real life material might become compulsory! [...] [S]muggling, the boom in heroin exports, military dictators, venal civilians, corrupt civil servants, bought judges, newspapers of whose

> stories the only thing that can confidently be said is that they are lies. [...] Imagine my difficulties! (*S*, pp.69-70)

The Narrator suggests that he does not need to talk about all the unpleasant aspects of life, but nevertheless he manages to highlight a huge range of those nasty realities.

The Narrator disingenuously pretends that his fantastic story will avoid the consequences that await realistic accounts of Pakistani life:

> By now if I had been writing a book of this nature, it would have done me no good to protest that I was writing universally, not only about Pakistan. The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer's heart.
>
> Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that's all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken, either.
>
> What a relief! (p.70)

At first glance, he appears to be claiming that his tale has no importance or moral force because it is a fantasy. But the Narrator is being ironic, because not only does he list the crimes of a succession of political regimes, but his political fairy-tale focuses upon those atrocities. It is an imaginative reservoir of proscribed memories.

Despite its unrealistic fairy-tale form, the military regime in Pakistan understood that *Shame* was an attack on it and banned the novel, as both the Narrator and the author expected. Rushdie points out that he could only safely write *Shame* while outside Pakistan; 'nobody in Pakistan could write the book, because they'd die'.[159]

Shame uses fantasy to satirise and confront the rulers of Pakistan, and '*the power of the regime*'.[160] Brain fever has mentally retarded Sufiya Zinobia, the

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[159] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.259.
[160] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.153.

elder daughter of dictator General Raza Hyder. Although Sufiya is both unusually innocent and beautiful, within her lurks a demon, the 'Beast of shame' (*S*, p.286).

This Beast gradually possesses Sufiya:

> Appearances notwithstanding, however, this Sufiya Zinobia turned out to be, in reality, one of those supernatural beings, those exterminating or avenging angels, or werewolves, or vampires, about whom we are happy to read in stories, sighing thankfully or even a little smugly while they scare the pants off us that it's just as well they are no more than abstractions or figments; because we know (but do not say) that the mere likelihood of their existence would utterly subvert the laws by which we live, the processes by which we understand the world. (p.197)

The Beast inside Sufiya represents a challenge to the very structure of the empirical universe. She can be described, but not accounted for, and remains a supernatural, irrational force.

Sufiya Zinobia's brain fever 'enabled her to absorb, like a sponge, a host of unfelt feelings' (p.122). The emotions of regret, guilt, embarrassment, propriety and shame, which those around her reject, pour into her and feed the Beast. This dark force 'which had been born of shame' (p.242) becomes the personification of Raza's unfelt shame for his tyranny and the murder of Iskander.

The Narrator suggests:

> humiliate people long enough and a wildness bursts out of them. Afterwards, surveying the wreckage of their rage, they look bewildered [...] then, slowly, pride dawns on them, pride in their power, in having learned to hit back [...] it's a seductive, silky thing, this violence. (p.117)

Sufiya Zinobia becomes an embodiment of the spirit and latent power of the repressed within this society. Pakistani women are grossly limited by their domestic roles and shackled by notions of honour and shame, but many men act shamelessly in the novel. Corruption, exploitation and hypocrisy are rife. All of these abuses feed the anger of the Beast.

Sufiya is the nemesis of her father, and becomes the means by which he is defeated. The Narrator warns the readers that his fantastic tale will end unrealistically:

> How does a dictator fall? There is an old saw which states, with absurd optimism, that it is in the nature of tyrannies to end. One might as well say that it is also in their natures to begin, to continue, to dig themselves in, and, often, to be preserved by greater powers than their own.
>
> Well, well, I mustn't forget I'm only telling a fairy-story. My dictator will be toppled by goblinish, faery means. (*S*, p.257)

The Narrator announces that he is going to topple Raza Hyder by fairy-tale means. But he admits that this is a deus ex machina solution: '"Makes it pretty easy for you," is the obvious criticism; and I agree. [...] But add, [...] "*You* try and get rid of a dictator some time"' (p.257).

Using supernatural means to solve a practical problem seems to be an act of bad faith, but the Narrator is not failing to suggest plausible solutions. He uses fantasy to show reality from another perspective. Despite the supernatural action, the novel actually shows Raza being defeated realistically. Eventually, the Beast totally possesses Sufiya and she begins a savage, nomadic life, preying on humans and animals, ripping their heads off bare-handedly. When he fails to stop the murders, Raza's generals lose faith in him. They deposed him after publicising scandals in his family to fan public unrest.

Ultimately Sufiya stands for the shame of the entire country, not just her father, and the Beast aims its fury at her husband, Omar, because he is the embodiment of shamelessness. He is an illegitimate child and his mothers forbid him ever to feel shame. He follows this faithfully, proceeding to ignore family duty, and although he becomes a highly respected doctor, leads an immoral and dissolute private life. These are minor offences in comparison to Raza and Iskander's

crimes, but Omar's symbolic shamelessness and unfettered spirit links him in opposition to Sufiya. Rushdie suggests that 'in their different ways they are both repositories of the society, and that's why they are married'.[161]

The novel closes with the Beast's destruction of Omar, and then of Sufiya herself, since 'on the day of reckoning the judges are not exempt from judgment' (*S*, p.286). The Beast explodes out of Sufiya in an image that 'suggests the explosion of a nuclear bomb'.[162] The Narrator watches the explosion:

> a shock-wave that demolishes the house, and after it the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene, until I can no longer see what is no longer there. (*S*, p.286)

Omar's house represents the closed and limited world of Pakistan, before and after Partition, and its destruction warns of the consequences of generating and then unleashing demonic shame. Rushdie considers that 'at some point – since the stresses inside the society [of Pakistan] are so great – unless something is done to defuse the bomb, it will blow up'.[163]

However, this novel is not only about Pakistan. Rushdie considers that:

> the question about Pakistan doesn't matter to *Shame*, because the book has to make its own world. Whether or not you know anything about Pakistan shouldn't be a factor in reading a fiction, because the book has to tell you what you need to know, and if it doesn't it fails. You make a world, and you try to make it cohere and mean something about the world that you don't make, the actual world. (p.258)

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[161] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.255.
[162] Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.254.
[163] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.257.

The novel does not prophecy the fate of General Zia, but uses the history of Pakistan to create a fictional world which illustrates universal ideas about corruption, humiliation and shame.[164]

Rushdie considers that the emotion of shame is:

> one of the most central means of orchestrating our experience. [...] I have a feeling that it is not peculiar to the east, but I didn't explore that; I thought that if it were universal the only way of showing that was to be, concrete and particular.[165]

The images created in the novel should be sufficiently powerful to explore this theme without readers already knowing all the realities of Pakistani politics. Knowing that the fictional events could happen is enough, lending the novel the authority of a false document. Knowing that *Shame* records events which are historical as well as fictional creates an 'intravention' and allows 'fiction to give counsel' again.[166]

However, *Shame* does not mix history and fiction in the same way as *Robinson Crusoe* or Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*, where the author pretends to be only the editor of a discovered history. *Shame* inverts and remakes the conventions of the false document. The Narrator admits that he is a liar, explicitly contrasting the facts of history with his own fairy-tale events, to underscore the similarities of both forms and highlight the fictional elements of official history.

Shame is a fairy-tale version of a history that is routinely created from lies and propaganda. By emphasising the fictional nature of history, and the consequences of its corruption, the novel demonstrates that self-confessed fictional works can

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[164] General Zia died five years after *Shame* was published, in a plane crash, which may or may not have been accidental. Democracy was restored but corruption continued to dominate Pakistani politics, leading to yet another military coup d'état in October 1999. Also, recent tensions between India and Pakistan have led to a terrifying exchange of nuclear bomb tests, turning the image at the end of *Shame* from a metaphor into an historical possibility.
[165] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.242.
[166] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.157.

also be practically useful and even imaginatively 'truthful' in examining and remembering history.

Doctorow suggests that:

> As clowns in the circus imitate the aerialists and tightrope walkers, first for laughs and then so that it can be seen that they do it better, we have it in us to compose false documents more valid, more real, more truthful than the 'true' documents of the politicians or the journalists or the psychologists.[167]

As Postmodern novels demonstrate that historical facts and empirical evidence are open to manipulation, fiction is no longer isolated, and begins to take back its lost status as a valid method of 'giving counsel' (p.154). Doctorow feels legitimated by fiction's acknowledgement of its artificiality:

> Novelists know explicitly that the world in which we live is still to be formed and that reality is amenable to any construction that is placed upon it. It is a world made for liars and we are born liars. But we are to be trusted because ours is the only profession forced to admit that it lies—and that bestows upon us the mantle of honesty. (p.164)

Rushdie argues that:

> description is itself a political act. The black American writer Richard Wright once wrote that black and white Americans were engaged in a war over the nature of reality. Their descriptions were incompatible. So it is clear that redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it. And particularly at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized. 'The struggle of man against power,' Milan Kundera has written, 'is the struggle of memory against forgetting.'[168] Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth. (*IH*, pp.13-14)

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[167] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.164.

[168] Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. by Aaron Asher, rev. trans. (London: Faber and Faber, 1996, (1980)), p.4. Orig. written in Czech in 1978 and pub. in French (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

History ceases to be seen as a single narrative. Postmodern history is a collection of incompatible, competing discourses, each making their own realities. Literature takes part in these historical debates, because it too creates descriptions of the world out of words. Rushdie feels that 'literature can, and perhaps must, give the lie to official facts' (*IH*, p.14), especially when regimes are creating authorised histories which distort memories and hide atrocities.

Rushdie opposes George Orwell's claim that 'progress and reaction have both turned out to be swindles. Seemingly there is nothing left but quietism—robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it'.[169] Orwell suggests that writers allow themselves to be swallowed by a metaphorical whale, to ride out the storm of history. He advocates simply recording the ordinary, powerless individual's sense of history and politics as 'something completely meaningless, a nightmare happening in a void' (p.523).

However, 'we live in a world without hiding places; the missiles have made sure of that' (*IH*, p.99). Rushdie points out that ordinary people are not always helpless; the Iranian, Nicaraguan and Indian revolutions were all mass movements. Also, writers cannot simply record events when those events are disputed. Rushdie believes that it is:

> imperative that literature enter such arguments, because what is being disputed is nothing less than *what is the case*, what is truth and what untruth. If writers leave the business of making pictures of the world to politicians, it will be one of history's great and most abject abdications. (p.100)

Literature's ability to discuss and defend 'truth' becomes most important at the very moment when people most doubt the veracity of history and politics, and criticise the concept of truthfulness.

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[169] Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', p.526.

Rushdie's own fiction contributes to the deconstruction of 'truth', showing that we can never know anything certainly, or completely resolve ambiguities. But the loss of certainty is precisely why those who most violently or cynically claim to be certain of the truth should be vigorously challenged. Postmodern literature does not give up the search for truth, but moves that search onto another level, to examine the status of knowledge in a world without justifying metanarratives. One of the many truths which Postmodern literature illustrates is that:

> outside the whale we see that we are all irradiated by history [...] and politics; we see that it can be as false to create a politics-free fictional universe as to create one in which nobody needs to work or eat or hate or love or sleep. (*IH*, p.100)

In this politicised world memory is one of the most potent weapons against those who manipulate history for their own ends. Rushdie admits that:

> I was under no illusions that *Midnight's Children* could change the world. But I did think that there were certain kinds of conversations which were not taking place in India and Pakistan. [...] I thought that because I write about these things people who read the book will be obliged to think about them.[170]

In *Midnight's Children* the suspension of democracy, political arrests, torture and forced sterilisations of the Emergency are detailed, although Mrs Gandhi denied them.

Midnight's Children also challenges the 'State truth' that the Pakistani army committed no atrocities in Bangladesh (*IH*, p.14). *Shame* reminds people that while military dictatorship is appalling, 'the last time there was an elected civilian government in Pakistan it actually did worse things than the Army is now doing'.[171]

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[170] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.250.
[171] Ibid., p.248.

In *Shame,* Iskander's wife, Rani, maintains memories of his rule which their daughter, Arjumand, does not wish to know. While under house arrest, after Raza's coup, Rani embroiders 'the eighteen shawls of memory', which she collectively entitles 'The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great' (*S*, p.191). These shawls are exquisite pictures of Iskander's many faults and crimes, saying 'unspeakable things which nobody wanted to hear' (p.191). The Narrator describes each one of the shawls, covering Iskander's vices from illicit sexual liaisons and swearing, through to destroying democracy. They also remember his violent invasion of the Eastern Wing, genocide in the hill province of Q., and his murder of his cousin.

Arjumand, however, supported and worked with her father. After his imprisonment and death she feels that 'his legend is in her care' (p.178) and remembers him as 'the martyr, the demigod' (p.191). When she regains power, her mother sends her the shawls to remind her about Iskander's dark side. The shawls are unwelcome, and 'ensure that [Rani] will never leave the estate again: Arjumand has her own mother placed under guard. People engaged in building new myths have no time for embroidered criticisms' (p.277). While a coup brings down Iskander's regime, and the Narrator topples Raza by magic, *Shame* shows that tyranny continues, but the 'new myths' and official 'facts' are challenged by memory and art.

However, it is impossible unselfconsciously to use the same language as the politicians while attacking them. Literature must reclaim language from those who cloak their lies in the trusted rhetoric of historical, religious, political and scientific language. *Shame* mixes fantasy with history to highlight the problems of

trusting history, and to place itself in opposition to those who use authoritative language.

The supernatural elements are crucial to the text because they drive the plot and represent the freedom of the imagination. Rushdie comments that 'in the twentieth century realism, reality has become very, very surrealist, it has become a very extreme, disrupted thing about which no two people can agree'.[172] He argues that where there is a conflict of descriptions of the world, and specifically in India:

> Fantasy, or the mingling of fantasy and naturalism, [...] offers a way of echoing in the form of our work the issues faced by all of us: how to build a new, 'modern' world out of an old, legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a newer one. (*IH*, p.19)

Novels use fantasy to dramatise the struggle between different ways of perceiving the world, and the conflict between those visions.

Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*[173] celebrates Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but demonstrates that the Postmodern era does not demand the same tragic vision. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston Smith's imagination and personality are destroyed and he ends up genuinely loving Big Brother. Sam, the hero of *Brazil*, appears to escape from his torturers, but this is revealed 'to have been the wish-fulfilment dream of his maddened brain' (*IH*, p.121). There are two versions of this end, though, and the American version then fills the torture chamber with 'the same fleecy white clouds amongst which, in his winged dreams, [Sam] used to fly' (p.121).

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[172] Rushdie, in Bragg, *Start the Week*, Radio 4.
[173] *Brazil*, dir. by Terry Gilliam (UK: MCA/Universal Pictures and Embassy International Pictures, 1985).

Rushdie believes that the American conclusion 'rather changes the meaning of the ending. It becomes a scene about the triumph of the imagination, the dream, over the shackles of actuality' (*IH*, p.121). But he is not advocating escapism into fantasy. Rushdie explains that what is in conflict in *Brazil* is two imaginative versions of the world:

> we are being told something very strange about the world of the imagination—that it is [...] *at war* with the 'real' world, the world in which things inevitably get worse. [...] Angelic Sam and devilish Mr Tuttle represent the power of dream-worlds to oppose this dark reality. In an age [...] in which we seem to make Dystopias the way earlier ages made Utopias; in which we appear to have lost confidence in our ability to improve the world, Gilliam brings heartening news [...] the world of the imagination is a place into which the long arm of the law is unable to reach. (p.122)

Brazil demonstrates that the 'real' world is as much an imaginative creation as Sam's dream world. There has never been a regime whose control is so complete that resistance, even in the mind, is useless. This vision of the world as an ever-declining society is a symptom of our sense of uncertainty and failure to imagine change. The dream world is not an escape from unpalatable reality, but a challenge to a pessimistic and debilitating illusion.

Brazil's dream world demonstrates the potential of the free play of the imagination in the Postmodern era:

> the opposition of imagination to reality [...] is of great importance, because it reminds us that we are not helpless; that to dream is to have power. [...] [T]he true location of Brazil is the [...] great tradition in art [...] in which techniques of comedy, metaphor, heightened imagery, fantasy and so on are used to break down our conventional, habit-dulled certainties about what the world is and has to be. Unreality is the only weapon with which reality can be smashed, so that it may subsequently be reconstructed. (*IH*, p.122)

What is perceived as 'reality' is shown to be another illusory construction. *Brazil* confronts the nightmare power of the regime, with flights of the imagination. Although Sam loses himself to madness, Mr Tuttle, the militant repairman,

'swings on, like an urban Tarzan' (*IH*, p.122) challenging state control. Fantasy does not challenge raw reality but our pre-conditioned perception of it.

Rushdie points out that the artistic imagination has already made a large contribution to our perceptions of reality:

> *Play. Invent the world.* The power of the playful imagination to change for ever our perceptions of how things are has been demonstrated by everyone from Laurence Sterne, in *Tristram Shandy*, to a certain Monty Python in his *Flying Circus*. Our sense of the modern world is as much the creation of Kafka, with his unexplained trials and unapproachable castles and giant bugs, as it is of Freud, Marx or Einstein. (p.123)

If art has contributed to the creation of visions of reality, then art is in a strong position to challenge those visions.

But there is a danger that reality itself will be forgotten in the play of the imagination and whimsy will result. *Brazil* combines absurdly literal torture confessions with grotesque scenes where 'people about to be killed look so ridiculous with their heads hidden inside bags' (*IH*, p.124). The absurdist elements represent the freedom of the imagination, but 'by darkening his humour, Gilliam avoids the trap of whimsy' (p.124). Rushdie suggests that 'there is a comedy that doesn't always make you laugh. [...] I think of *Shame* as a comedy, although in a way it is even nastier than *Midnight's Children*'.[174] The dark comedy and the fantastic elements combine to give force to *Shame*'s attack on a political regime whose propaganda is totally divorced from reality.

John Haffenden considers that 'the perilous paradox seems to me that one of [Rushdie's] impulses in writing [...] *Shame* was an urgent political one, and yet [he] compose[d] the subjects with such inventive bizarrerie ... as entertainment, in

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[174] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.240.

fact'. He 'felt uneasy as to whether that mode of burlesque was right'.[175] Haffenden is worried that using fantasy, and not strict realism, to present history, is unacceptable, since fantastic fiction is too ambiguous a medium to trust. But Postmodern novels self-consciously confront issues of trust and authority in history and fiction. Rushdie admits that 'there is a danger that things which are fun to write about will take over from what you're trying to say, but it is a matter of craft'.[176]

Very dark humour is a method of deflating political rhetoric and pomposity. Although Rushdie was writing about people guilty of very serious atrocities, he was not afraid to ridicule them:

> I [...] felt that the characters involved didn't deserve high tragedy. Although the relationship between Raza and Iskander is basically tragic, the actual figures are clowns – gangsters, hoodlums – and not people who deserve Shakespearian tragedy. So [...] you have to write black comedy. [...] [I]t doesn't lose the tragic content – the story is still the story – but it gains an extra dimension which makes the characters more human. (p.241)

These tyrants are exposed as greedy and limited, not accorded heroic or mythic status. Dictators maintain their power by presenting themselves as superior. By demonstrating their human frailties and crimes, fiction helps to change the perception of dictators, and this creates the possibility of change.

Hutcheon also appears to privilege the role of fiction and the imagination in historiographic metafiction. However, her emphasis on defeating the dominance of one form of discourse, Enlightenment history, leads her to advocate a position where no discourse has any moral force. She does not consider Doctorow or

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[175] Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, pp.240-41.
[176] Rushdie, in Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p.241.

Rushdie's novels to be fighting passionately on the side of the imagination, but evenly questioning the power of the imagination as well as the regime.

Hutcheon suggests that Doctorow's 'novels, like those of other historiographic metafictionists, work to investigate the overlappings of, as well as the distinctions between, these kinds of power'.[177] She concentrates on the literary similarities of both disciplines, rather than their oppositions. Both *Ragtime* and one of its literary sources, *Michael Kohlhaas*, mix historical and literary characters. But Hutcheon does not believe that either work focuses upon literature:

> in neither, I would argue, does this imply any overvaluing of the fictional. It is the narrativity and the textuality of our knowledge of the past that are being stressed; it is not a question of privileging the fictive or the historical, but of seeing what they share. (p.136)

Hutcheon reads Doctorow's text as a mild polemic, not a novel; it becomes a colourful, imaginative indictment of history, rather than a work of art.

It is quite possible that the complexities of authors' works contradict their literary manifestos. However, Hutcheon's reading seems paradoxically to invert the importance of the historical twice in Postmodern fiction, first undermining it, then privileging it. She radically changes the tone of *Ragtime* by reducing the importance of the power of the imagination, transforming it into just another form for extracting understandings from reality. In this critique, even within a novel literature is an irrelevant and second-class subject.

While attacking history, and other Enlightenment metanarratives, Hutcheon is self-consciously concerned not to establish a new, falsely authoritative metanarrative. If history is merely a fallible human discourse, then literature is equally fallible. Rushdie agrees that 'nothing so inexact, so easily and frequently

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[177] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p.207.

misconceived [as literature], deserves the protection of being declared sacrosanct. [...] We must not become what we oppose' (*IH*, p.427). However, Doctorow is not suggesting that literature should be set up as a divine source of wisdom, but respected as a powerful human tool.

Hutcheon would perhaps not have become entangled in a maze of her own making, devaluing fiction in valuing it, if she had allowed literature to take sides in its debates with Enlightenment metanarratives. Certainty and mastery are unacceptable in Postmodern dialogues. But neutrality, objectivity and a balanced overview are all positions that Postmodern narratives, including Hutcheon's own, have vigorously demonstrated to be impossible goals or fraudulent disguises.

In attempting to negotiate these extremes, Hutcheon tends to view taking sides as the first step towards all the worst excesses of totalitarianism. But by apologising for studying literature and for literature's belief that art itself is important, Hutcheon unconsciously confirms, while trying to consciously question, the dominant empirical view that art is not important, but should have some practical value.

Postmodern literature examines the world and history; however, Hutcheon's emphases appear to produce skewed readings. Postmodern texts use their self-conscious fictionality and uncertainty to address wider issues, but arguably, this strategy is simultaneously operating in reverse. Because fiction is a powerful, emotional method of experiencing, shaping and reading society, art becomes not just a cipher for the world, but important and interesting in its own right. Doctorow and other Postmodern authors do not privilege art as a superior realm, apart from the world, but they also do not make it subservient to other discourses such as history, or empirical patterns of thought.

Connor claims that Hutcheon's model 'seems to undermine the underlying essence of the literary. Literature is revealed in Hutcheon's account as no longer simply, transcendently itself, for "historiographic metafiction" is always part of a larger set of discursive practises'.[178] As literature is subsumed into the anonymity of this community of discourses, it seems to lose much of its identity and power. Hutcheon demonstrates the textuality of the world, but ultimately fails to find a specific role for literature within the Postmodern textual world, beyond demonstrating that 'textuality. Hutcheon reduces Postmodern literature to describing and expressing, rather than participating in society's great debates.

Shame does much more than simply describe society's problems. The imagination is actively at war with established views of reality in the novel. Not only are the realities created by dictators directly challenged by the fantasy, but also the nature of Pakistan itself is demonstrated to be fictional. Pakistan was an organic part of India, until 1947 when they were partitioned along religious lines. Even the name of the country was made-up by Muslim intellectuals living in England.

'Pakistan' was:

> a word born in exile which then went East, was borne-across or translated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. The past was rewritten, there was nothing else to do. (*S*, p.87)

To justify the country it was deemed necessary to pretend that it was significantly different from India, and its founders used Islam as its founding metanarrative.

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[178] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, p.132.

The original inhabitants found the imaginative change from living in ancient India to new Pakistan very difficult:

> their imaginations simply weren't up to the job, [...] so it was the ones who really were new, [...] who took over and got things going. The newness of those days felt pretty unstable; it was a dislocated, rootless sort of thing. (*S*, p.81)

When Bilquis moves in with her Pakistani in-laws, there are both culture clashes and a struggle for position between the natives and the migrants, or '*mohajirs*' (p.87).

The Narrator argues that:

> It is possible to see the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been-imposed. It is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her vision on the world; and Pakistan, the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself, may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind. Perhaps [...] the place was just *insufficiently imagined*, a picture full of irreconcilable elements, [...] now versus then: a miracle that went wrong. (p.87)

The migrants' vision did not grow out of Pakistan's past, but was violently imposed on it from outside, and failed to describe all of reality.

The Narrator claims that:

> I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change. (pp.87-88)

Shame is an attempt to 'face the problem of history' and 'deal with change'. By rewriting the official history the novel tries to reveal why Pakistan turned out to be 'a miracle that went wrong' (p.87). Dictators used Islam as a shield behind which they could shelter from their crimes. But if Pakistan had truly been run as a moderate Islamic country, then the Narrator believes that 'Islam might well have proven an effective unifying force in post-Bangladesh Pakistan' (p.251).

However, as the repression has grown, so has the imposed fundamentalism. Religion is the 'justifying myth of the nation' (*S*, p.251) but its abuse by dictators might cause the country to lose faith in that myth. In which case the country will either disintegrate, be held together only by the force of another dictator, or accept a new myth. The Narrator 'highly' recommends 'liberty; equality; fraternity' (p.251) as a fresh foundation for the state. The imaginative re-thinking of the history of Pakistan illustrates that there are other ways to imagine the world, and the novel suggests one way, while carefully acknowledging that the ideals of the French Revolution did not prevent the 'Terror' (p.240).

Malcolm Bradbury has suggested that 'like Márquez and Kundera, with whom he is so naturally contemporary, Rushdie shows us with what fantasy our sort of history must now be written — if, that is, we are to penetrate it, and perhaps even save it'.[179] The fantastic historiographic metafiction of *Shame* shows a country that is totally alienated from its own Indian past, in order to claim a new future. But the constant battles between the past and the present prevent any future from arriving. The country is caught in a never-ending present of disillusionment and repression, trying and failing to control the past. *Shame* represents an attempt to resolve the conflict of the past and the present by acknowledging the whole past, both Indian and unofficial.

Shame uses the creation of fantastic and self-consciously partial history to attack the false authority of those in power. Rather than being an academic exercise in which realism and traditional history are shown to be insufficiently flexible to express the complexities of the Postmodern world, they are exposed as tools of repressive regimes and manipulative Establishments.

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[179] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Rushdie's Modern History', *Guardian*, Thursday 8 September 1983, p.14.

But *Shame* also demonstrates the importance of addressing the present's current alienation from the past. The present cannot free itself of an embarrassingly out-of-date or unpleasant past simply by imposing a new image upon itself, because the present grows out of that past. Society must come to an accommodation with its past, and *Shame* is an attempt to work towards just such an accommodation by remembering all of the forces which shape the present, including the forces of the imagination.

THE POSTMODERN EVENT IN *1982, JANINE*

Since the flow of history has been disrupted, Postmodern society has been disinclined to accept new programmes, but has also found it difficult to face the idea of a future with no sense of active history or meaning. This difficulty is expressed as the anxiety about the future in the media, the 'apocalyptic tone in philosophy'[180] and in studying the present to find strange new versions of history in Postmodern novels.

Salman Rushdie considers that 'art, too, is an event in history, subject to the historical process. But it is also *about* that process, and must constantly strive to find new forms to mirror an endlessly renewed world' (*IH*, p.418). If the historical imagination is now caught in a continuous present, then art, including literature, must find new forms to address this historical development. Gray suggests that of all the arts, literature may be best placed to address the problem of the failure of the historical imagination. Because 'writing [...] operates through the medium of time, whereas painting and sculpture operate through the medium of space'.[181]

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[180] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.15.
[181] Alasdair Gray, in 'Alasdair Gray, Visual Artist', by Cordelia Oliver, in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, ed. by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp.22-36 (p.30).

Doctorow's rejection of traditional history does not mean that he wishes to cut himself off from the past either. To make sense of the present, he feels that it is essential that fiction must return to the past:

> In order to begin to rebuild our sense of ourselves, we may have to go back to childhood, to the past, and down into our dreams, and start again. In order to reclaim our society, we need the words to find it. If we make that effort, [the present] may not be an end but a beginning.[182]

In order to reconnect the present with the past, Postmodern literature has to renegotiate its links with history.

1982, Janine is deeply involved in issues of historicity: unusually, even its title contains a date. It focuses upon our responsibility for creating the malignant ahistorical Postmodern moment, and the vital necessity of remembering the past in order to survive. The narrative is set in Jock's mind, during the course of one night, as he struggles with his personal demons, and in the process, the text attempts to create new forms of history.

The first half of the novel explores the ahistorical Postmodern present, dwelling upon Jock's use of alcohol, sadistic sexual fantasies, and cynical Conservative philosophy to repress his memories. His alcoholism and sexual fantasies 'are devices to stop him remembering who he is'.[183] Jock deliberately occupies a form of continuous present; however, his memories constantly threaten to break through his carefully constructed barricades. Initially, the novel does not explain what memories Jock wants to suppress, or what makes them so painful, but beginsto give clues and hints of a story of betrayal and loss.

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[182] Doctorow, *Poets and Presidents*, p.116.
[183] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.24.

On the first page of *1982, Janine*, Jock is reluctant to explain who he is. He wants to remain anonymous, just anyone among countless ordinary people, anywhere in the world. As details emerge, his identity becomes clear through a process of narrowing. Jock protests that excluding any possibility is 'a pity. I hate feeling limited' (*J*, p.11). He refuses to describe his job, claiming that 'it does not matter how I earn my bread. The topic has ceased to sicken me. I don't think about it' (p.11).

Employment is one of the great modes of classification, and thus limiting, in society, and Jock's job creating security traps and barriers is especially confining. As the novel progresses, his job becomes increasingly linked to his current state of distress. When his wife, Helen, leaves him before he is even forty, he realises that she 'saw me as a tired old man good for nothing but his job' (p.33).

At first, the only clue that the novel gives readers about how Jock developed is a hint that he has limited himself. *1982, Janine* quotes Paul Valêry in its epigraph:

> There are boxes in the mind with labels on them: To study on a favourable occasion; Never to be thought about; Useless to go into further; Contents unexamined; Pointless business; Urgent; Dangerous; Delicate; Impossible; Abandoned; Reserved for others; My business; etcetera.[184]

Deliberately closed 'boxes in the mind' circumscribes and defines the inner life of Jock. He is an electrical engineer, a 'man of power', but also 'trapped in an emotional short-circuit'.[185] He devises 'traps to keep people out of the power centres that other people are constructing [...] to shut themselves into what they feel is safer ground'.[186] Jock also shuts himself away emotionally, trying to hide from painful memories and difficult understandings.

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[184] Paul Valéry, Epigram, *1982, Janine*, p.7. Orig. pub. in Mauvaises pensées et autres, Œuvres de Paul Valéry (Paris; Gallimard, 1947, (1942)), p. 20.
[185] Gray, in Anderson and Norquay, *Cencrastus*, p.9.
[186] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.23.

Jock uses nasty pornographic fantasies to suppress his memories. While remembering his childhood, Jock catches sight of his own mortality: 'Now I am almost fiforget that forget that where did I leave Janine?' (*J*, p.20). His present age scares Jock, and reminds him of the passage of time. His war against remembering the past demands that he ignore the passage of time and the future. He frequently demands that he 'forget that,' with increasing desperation, during the first half of the text.

He decides that to relieve his anger against women his stories need to be motivated by 'revenge. On a woman. Revenge for what? [...] I refuse to remember my marriage. I will pour into the mouth of this head another dram of stupidity. The questioning part of this brain is too active tonight' (p.15). Even while using fantasy to repress memory, those memories seep through. Jock is so alienated from his memory that he refers to his head as if it was a disembodied object, and then tries to obscure the nagging memories with whisky.

Gray justifies the detailed and highly unpleasant sadistic fantasies by explaining that 'I don't think that [Jock is] actually thinking about the sexual act. He's thinking about power over one of another sex, [...] the logistics of keeping the thing running, there has to be infinite postponement'.[187] The sexual sadism in *1982, Janine* expresses Jock's own sense of alienation and powerlessness. However, his need for infinite postponement is another crucial expression of the barren permanent present that Jock creates for himself.

Jock's fantasies reveal more about himself than he wishes because they grow organically out of his experiences and desires. Gray feels:

> that Jock [...] must have a sex life that is all fantasy, because in the present time he has nothing else [...] because a man who restricts the

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[187] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.24.

> intuitive and sensual part of his nature *must* be haunted by these dreams.[188]

Jock dreams dreadful dreams because he perverted and restricted his humanity.

Gray bases his design for the cover of the novel on Leonardo da Vinci's sketch of the Vitruvian Man. But in Gray's version:

> instead of the intellectual man demonstrating that his body and proportions are the measure of the universe, he has drawn a careful little circle around himself which identifies the universe as shutting him in completely. [...] [T]his was a bloke who goes, 'Aha! Here I am and this is how it goes, here I am.' He's trapped himself in what he's able to measure. He's not content with it and knows it isn't enough.[189]

Jock is not trapped in a rigid external universe, he has trapped himself in a universe that he has created for himself, but he has done this with the help of others.

Jock's other obsession is politics. Although his father was a Socialist, he is a Conservative, not out of idealistic conviction but cynicism:

> The bit of Marx I reject is the prophetic bit. He thought that the poorly paid would eventually organise themselves and overpower the moneyed people. I'm sure they won't, and I'm not going to join a gang of losers.. This is selfish of me and probably wicked but like everyone else I would rather be thought wicked than stupid. (*J*, p.62)

Jock sees nothing but exploitation around him, so chooses the side of the exploiters rather than the exploited.

However, Jock is not happy about his choice, because he understands that it means he is party to all the cruelties. The connections within politics are another set of links that Jock tries not to make. But he finds it hard not to draw conclusions when he thinks about politics, and is often carried away by anger. At one point he has to tell himself to 'cool down cool down you are goading yourself

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[188] Gray, in Anderson and Norquay, *Cencrastus*, p.9.
[189] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.23.

into a FRENZY my friend, think about fucking Superb, think about fucking Janine, don't think about fucking POLITICS' (*J*, p.66).

When a girl friend, Sontag, becomes interested in his fantasies he has to lie about his politics, because:

> If she succeeded in connecting [these fantasies] to ordinary life she would make me feel responsible for every atrocity from Auschwitz and Nagasaki to Vietnam and the war in Ulster and I REFUSE TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT EVERYTHING. Thinking is a pain because it joins everything together until my mother father Mad Hislop Jane Russell mushroomcloud miniskirt tight jeans Janine dead friend Helen Superb Sontag 'editor sad lesbian police Big Momma and the whore under the bridge surround me all proving that I am a bad man, I am what is wrong with the world, I am a tyrant, I am a weakling, I never gave what they wanted, I grabbed all I could get. (p.66)

Jock can only be a Conservative by pessimistically believing that he is powerless to improve the world. He can only believe this by refusing to think about the connections between public and private responsibility. When he remembers acts of power, choice, selfishness and cruelty, it forces him to see that he was never powerless to improve the world. These are the painful conclusions that he tries to prevent himself from reaching.

Memories of his father and Old Red, a radical socialist, challenges Jock's belief that things will never change. Jock's Dad believes that he volunteered for the Great War because 'in the circumstances it could not have been otherwise' (p.149). Old Red instantly disagrees, reminding him of the unofficial Christmas Truce, when ordinary soldiers from both sides held a truce in defiance of their officers. The truce proves that in the circumstances things could still have been different:

> Those who think that the past could not have been different come to feel that the present cannot be changed or the future either. God knows I am a dedicated atheist but even Christianity is better than spineless oriental fatalism. (p.149)

As Jock's political view change, his previous convictions are seen as a symptom of his inadequacies. But the social, political and economic injustices that made him angry remain. He no longer explains them away as inevitable, with his own brand of spineless Scottish fatalism. They stand as testaments to the aspects of human society which could have been changed in the past, challenging the present and the future not to repeat those mistakes.

Jock's political diatribes, although leading him to conclusions which he later rejects, are more than just illustrations of his cynicism. Kathy Acker suggests that 'most of Alasdair's strong passions lie not in the realm of sex but lie in the realm of politics'.[190] Jonathon Coe agrees that all of Gray's novels:

> descend into polemic quite frequently, I think they ascend into polemic in fact. [...] What is it that stops that from becoming sort of tub-thumping I think is the depth of human involvement he makes you feel with his characters. [...] The sense that they have an internal life of their own and they're not there just as mouthpieces for his philosophy.[191]

In *1982, Janine* Jock's political anger is not only part of his characterisation, but has much wider implications.

Jock's cowardly acquiescence in the abuses of big business and the dismantling of the welfare state echoes the general indifference to the destruction of the community by political and economic forces. Gray describes the post-war period as a time when 'everything that is now regarded as Utopian fantasy was being immediately put into practice'. He strongly criticises 'seeing all the great things that we were proud to be British because of being taken away'[192] from following

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[190] Kathy Acker, in 'Late Show Special: Alasdair Gray', *The Late Show*, BBC 2, October 1993.
[191] Jonathon Coe, in 'Late Show Special: Alasdair Gray', *The Late Show*, BBC 2, October 1993.
[192] Gray, in Kane, *Usual Suspects*, Radio Scotland.

generations. Gray hopes that *1982, Janine* 'can keep the memory of some things going. You know, people's memories, they are the main thing'.[193]

1982, Janine uses the continuous Postmodern present to maintain memories of an entirely different political age, through Jock's impotent anger. His personal and political memories insist on disrupting his present isolation, reminding him of his responsibilities. But these memories also remind the readers of their own unavoidable complicity in the present state of the world. If Jock cannot escape memories of his past, the novel attempts to communicate those political memories to other people, because without those memories the present is built on ignorance.

Although Jock tries to live wholly in the present, he cannot. Gray describes Jock as:

> finding it impossible to put up with himself. [...] [T]his is the worst night he's had because he's reached a point at which he's less capable of remembering the kind of person he is than he has ever been before.[194]

Jock is 'less capable of remembering' because he is continually stopping himself with increasing amounts of alcohol and fantasies. He is thus putting greater and greater strain upon his identity and driving himself towards a breakdown. But at the same time those escape routes are increasingly failing to work as disjointed memories violently return.

Jock can no longer cope with his present when he finds that he 'is sick of fantasies'. However, he cannot escape the present, because the 'past is a flowering minefield. All the goodness I have known grows there but grows among explosives which drive shrapnel into my brain whenever I disturb them' (*J*, p.133). And he cannot find hope in the future because:

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[193] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.35.
[194] Ibid., p.24.

> the future is nothing. Nada. I have reached the summit of my profession, the edge of the precipice. I can only be promoted sideways to a desk job which would kill me in less than a year. My present job will do that too. [...] My only hope for the future is a sudden change in my surroundings, a change I cannot initiate. A war would do the trick. (*J*, p.133-34)

Eventually Jock admits that he is 'not a true Conservative. A true Conservative has faith in some established institution which he thinks will save him [...] I don't give a tuppenny damn for that lot either. I suppose I am a nihilist now' (p.152).

With no future, no past he is prepared to remember and a present that can no longer hold out against the pain of connecting or breaking-down, Jock tries to kill himself. Suicide is the only escape left because 'of course death is the only thing he can depend on to stop himself' remembering.[195] This is a catastrophic event, which shatters the illusion of an eternal, unchanging present.

Fredric Jameson describes Postmodernism as looking 'for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the tell-tale instant after which it is no longer the same'.[196] Once society loses imaginative touch with the past, and with it the future, it is condemned to a form of permanent present, where brute events are all that are left after historical significance is forgotten. Jameson feels that where Modernism was interested in the new and its consequences 'in Utopian or essential fashion', Postmodernism 'only clocks the variations themselves, and knows only too well that the contents are just more images' (p.ix).

Postmodern literature does concentrate upon radical, dislocating events, but not in the meaningless way that Jameson suggests. *A History Maker* revolves around a crucial event that radically disrupts society's concept of history and progress. The personal event of the hero's mysterious birth and the public event of the creation

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[195] Gray, in Figgis and McAllister, *Bête Noire*, p.24.
[196] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.ix.

of Pakistan generate *Shame*. Gray and Rushdie's novels all dwell upon personal events that radically disrupt the lives of their characters, and sometimes their society.

However, although these events are highly important in the novels, and their inclusion forms part of the Postmodern attempt to revisit history, in themselves they are not characteristic of the Postmodern condition. Personal and public revolutions have always been the material of literature. What makes disruptive events significant now is the way that they can be used to reveal Postmodern society's loss of its links with the past and future, and to try to give history new meaning.

The event is the only historical structure that can be distinguished in a continuous present. Consequently, theorists, such as Derrida, and literary critics, including Bill Readings and Bennet Schaber, have attempted to use the event as a way of orienting society within the continuous present. They suggest that the continual present of the Postmodern condition offers a unique opportunity for writers and artist to escape from limited preconceptions about history and historical development.

Derrida suggests that one way to understand the Postmodern condition and the forces of modernising transformation is to dismantle the established relationship 'between the supposed empirical reality of the event and the absolute identity of the liberal *telos* [...] on the basis of a new thinking or a new experience of the event'.[197] Theorists can challenge traditional end-orientated thinking by recognising the startling immediacy of the event.

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[197] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.69.

Derrida cites the collapse of the Soviet Union as one such critical event. Theorists have been predicting the demise of Communism since the sixties; however, it 'was not possible to deduce' whether or when Stalinism would actually collapse before that collapse happened in 1989.[198] Between the initial event of the idea of the collapse of Stalinism and the later event of its actual collapse, was a series of other events forming a period of 'event-ness [...] which no one managed to represent to themselves' (p.70). This was because the period was the product of transforming forces that traditional ideas could not describe , and which perturbed established philosophies.

However, Derrida argues that such eventness cannot be understood 'as long as one relies on a general temporality or an historical temporality made up of the *successive* linking of presents identical to themselves and contemporary with themselves' (p.70). It is impossible to consider the radical disruption of the event if people believe history to be the record of gradual changes in societies, suffering no disruption or sudden, dislocating, temporal change. It is only 'where history is finished, there where a certain determined concept of history comes to an end, precisely there the historicity of history begins' (p.74). When the idea of the linear flow of history becomes discredited it become possible to re-examine the historical changes in the concept of history.

Readingsand Schaber also stress the importance of the radical and dislocating event rather than of historical continuity in the Postmodern era:

> The event is the occurrence after which nothing will ever be the same. The event [...] happens in excess of the referential frame within which it might be understood, disrupting of displacing that frame. History will never be the same after the French Revolution. The revolution can only be understood elsewhere, in another history, for which it is no longer an event. The event is the radically singular happening that

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[198] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.69.

> cannot be represented within a general history without the loss of its singularity, its reduction to a moment. The time of the event is postmodern in that the event cannot be understood *at the time*, as it happens, because its singularity is alien to the language or structure of understanding to which it occurs.[199]

Readings and Schaber equate the radical disruption of the event with Postmodernism. They feel that Postmodernism is a state of being rather than an artistic movement or characterises an historical period. Postmodernism, here, is the immediate experience of the event, outside any historical perspective; the open state which is closed by the realist perspective. In attempting to disrupt the realist perspective in history and literary history, the contributors to *Postmodernism Across the Ages* re-write literary history in a radically different manner.

Readings and Schaber re-order the chronological sequence of the production and reception of fiction and commentaries. They do this because, unlike Rushdie, they hold that 'the art object is not in history, but marks a gap in historical time in the sense that it seems to inhabit at least two temporalities at once: an unthinkable future history and a past become uncannily present' (p.15). Art functions as a memorial to its own creation.

By re-arranging the order of works and aesthetic ideas Reading and Schaber attempt to use what they see as the peculiar temporal position of art works to revitalise perceptions of time and radical change. They attempt to write 'not the history of the uncanny but the uncanniness of history' (p.20). Their intriguing project is to create a critical text that echoes its philosophical objection to linear history in its own form. They want to create readings that echo Pierre Menard's

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[199] Bill Readings and Bennet Schaber, 'Introduction: The Question Mark in the Midst of Modernity', in *Postmodernism Across the Ages: Essays for a Postmodernity That Wasn't Born Yesterday*, ed. by Bill Readings and Bennet Schaber (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp.1-28 (p.11).

project in Borges's story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*'.[200] Menard creates a few pages of Don Quixote, but he does not rewrite or copy the original. He tries to write the same text as Cervantes, using his own life.

The narrator is astounded at the difference of interpretation that the different contexts of the two texts generate. The seventeenth-century text grows out of its context naturally, while the twentieth century version is startling both in its reconsideration of modern thought and in its archaic language. The narrator then extends this technique to read old texts as if they were written in different periods, influenced by texts that post-dated them. He finds that the 'technique fills the most placid works with adventure' (p.71). However, the story is an original tale about revitalising literature.

By disrupting linear chronology, Readings and Schaber hope to force readers to reconsider both history and literature. This experiment does produce some interesting essays, but it does not entirely capture 'the uncanniness of history'. Despite trying to create a critical version of the anarchic freedom of Postmodern fiction, Readings and Schaber feel they must still justify their work by prefacing it with a defensive, historically situated introduction. This introduction does help readers whose conventions have been disrupted and are therefore confused. But the rational, historical explanation undermines the attempt to demonstrate the uncanniness of history by giving their work a familiar historical context within a literary narrative about Postmodernism deconstruction.

Derrida feels the radical event not only revitalises history, but also brings philosophical hope. After questioning traditional history, Derrida felt that:

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[200] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, preface by André Maurois, story trans. by James E. Irby, 2nd edn. (New York: New Directions, 1964), pp.62-71. Orig. pub. in *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Emecé, 1956).

> It was then a matter of thinking another historicity [...] another opening of event-ness as historicity that permitted one [...] to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise [...] and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design. Not only must one not renounce the emancipatory desire, it is necessary to insist on it more than ever [...] as the very indestructibility of the 'it is necessary'.[201]

Derrida moves away from the expectation of fulfilling a set project in the future towards expecting unexpected and radically disruptive events. He hopes that this will free 'the emancipatory desire' (p.75) of the Enlightenment from the now discredited metanarratives that once justified those ideals.

Derrida insists that one should think of the future as 'being-necessarily-promised' and describes this promise as the 'law' of the future (p.73). He argues that:

> It is this law that dislodges any present out of its contemporaneity with itself. Whether the promise promises this or that, whether it be fulfilled or not, or whether it be unfulfillable, there is necessarily some promise and therefore some historicity as future-to-come. (p.73)

The possibility of the future, represented in the expectation of unforeseen events, disrupts the present and propels society from one historical moment to the next without warning.

Expectations that there will be unforeseen events, without knowing in advance what those events might be or when they may occur, destroy traditional patterns of thought. According to Derrida, this allows historical change to be appreciated in the historical record. This also rescues a hope for imagining some relationship with the future, as the radically different, subsequent times which will arrive.

However, Derrida's attempt to retain Enlightenment ideals, as the promise of the future, while discarding projects to bring them about, does not seem to re-energise the future for the Postmodern society. The emancipatory ideals

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[201] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp.74-75.

previously retained an air of possibility because, as the stated aims of past and present actions, they were seen as directly connecting the present to history, promising progress. But by separating these ideals from the Enlightenment projects that were supposed to bring them about, the ideals are disconnected from the present. According to Derrida, Enlightenment ideals are no longer justifications for repression or emancipation. They remain infinitely postponed. The future that Derrida envisages no longer contains expectations of active emancipation, but merely the possibility that this might occur accidentally and passively.

Derrida, Readings and Schaber all try to make use of the event to describe the Postmodern moment, and to give it meaning. However, by privileging the event over any historical progression, they attempt to make a virtue out of necessity. These attempts do manage to express the ahistorical nature of the Postmodern condition, but do not give it further significance. It is how Postmodern novels uses events and images from history that enables them to attempt to create new forms of history.

1982, Janine uses the radical event of Jock's suicide bid not to destroy the already discredited ideas of traditional linear history, but to describe and disrupt current destructive Postmodern ahistoricism. Jock swallows a bottle of pills and settles back to die quietly, but he is soon caught in a nightmare world of pain and confusion, assaulted by 'the ministry of many voices' (*J*, p.9). The structure of the text breaks down with Jock's mind, as he suffers, fantasies and despairs. He remembers his old teacher, Mr Hislop, who taught him to separate his feelings from his life and put him on the barren path to his present misery. He also hears

someone who could be the Devil and someone with a tiny voice, who could be God, who pleads with Jock to stop killing himself.

God denies that He is the authoritarian figure that He has been portrayed. Instead, God is present in ordinary, generous life, and His 'one power is letting nothing rest which is not well balanced' (*J*, p.179). Jock is unbalanced, and cannot rest until he listens. God tells him that:

> i am the mercy you asked for the child and future you prayed for a new past listen look back the past is that fountain where all streams spring listen streams you damned flow under my ground dig here for the needed water' (p.182)

Jock does not need external, divine intervention to save himself. He has poisoned his present and his salvation and future is in fully remembering his past.

Bruce Charlton argues that 'from this point onwards we realize that there is no question of Jock returning to the state of mind at the beginning of the novel. He must go forward, and things can only get better after getting worse'.[202] The radical event of the novel ends Jock's empty present forever. However, it appears that he can only progress by creating a linear historical narrative of how he reached this state. Jock shows that he has changed profoundly by facing his past. He declares that:

> It behoves a man every so often [...] to speak out and inform the world (that is to say, himself) just what his game is; and if (having been carried by the prevailing current up shit creek after mislaying the paddle) he has no game of his own and finds life pointless, it behoves him to tell truthfully how he reached this pointless place in order to say Goodbye to it and go elsewhere. If he wants a change. Which I do. (*J*, p.191)

Alison Lumsden considers that:

> the only way [for Jock] to escape the trap of the past is to confront it. It is by this means that Jock is released into temporality – allowing his

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[202] Charlton, 'The World Must Become Quite Another', p.40.

> past to become a past-tense narrative rather than an ongoing nightmare – and thus finds a way to proceed.[203]

Jock's present is trapped in a past moment, which he has not lived through properly. Paradoxically, if Jock wants to find a future he must turn back and thoroughly experience the pain of his past. But this is not an innocent, escapist return to the past, or to traditional forms of the past. Jock reconsiders his past in the new light of his recent crisis, now understanding the inadequacy of his present.

Up to this point Jock's memories have been disjointed fragments, out of chronological order, only pushing through his defences whenever they can connect with some other part of his life. However, the new linear form of his memories is not end-orientated, attempting to reach an ideal conclusion, but recaps his life up to this already known low-point. It also gives an alternative perspective on his youth.

Instead of replacing the fragmented version, the new narrative adds to Jock's story. While he may change his opinions, his new story and its conclusions only makes sense read together with the first half of the novel, reflecting and contradicting the initial part of the tale. This linear narrative forms part of a plural structure by uncomfortably complimenting the proceeding story, rather than replacing it.

The linear structure also acts as a metaphor for Jock's new attitude to his life. When he tries to start his story, he finds himself diverted by politics:

> I am postponing the moment when I start telling my story in the difficult oldfashioned way, placing events in the order they befell. [...] This had better be done, though it will be hard. When we cannot see

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[203] Alison Lumsden, 'Innovation and Reaction in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray', in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, ed. by Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp.115-26 (p.117).

> our way in the world of course we circle circle circle until we stumble on a straight stretch of it, but then, even though that stretch was left behind years ago, let us use it to go *forward* for a change. Straight movement leads to pain, of course. [...] But if we prolong hope by circling round and round the spot which was once our destination hope dies of its own uselessness. We have avoided the disappointment which comes from finding out about a place, but also the regret, the delight, the renewal of departure. (*J*, p.192)

This passage self-consciously highlights the change of narrative form, the return to a new history, and the metaphorical use of linear form to suggest purpose. Where some critics, such as Spanos, attack linear thinking for over-simplifying our experience of life, *1982, Janine* uses it to represent an antidote to a particularly reductive, cyclical aspect of the Postmodern condition. At the same time the novel is not linear, but a multiple combination of cyclical and linear forms.

Jock does not remember his whole life; he has to focus on a specific period. This is the story of '*how I went wrong*' (p.191), and deals with another series of radical events which disrupted Jock's life and changed him. He is still trapped in the 'singularity'[204] of these events. He has to turn this crucial time from an open, indescribable moment into a piece of history, in order to make sense of it and to move beyond it. He has to objectify and order his memories to explain his present condition, to be able to function as a human being.

The turning point in Jock's past occurred when he was eighteen, at technical college and working back-stage on an Edinburgh Festival fringe production. During this time Jock is popular and successful, however, 'unluckily those months also contain my meanest and most cowardly actions, actions I have been trying to forget ever since. But [...] "Those who forget their own history are condemned to

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[204] Reading and Schaber, *Postmodernism Across the Ages*, p.11.

repeat it - as farce"' (*J*, p.192).[205] It is the connection between the best part of Jock's life with his worst actions which gives him such pain, and which combine to drive him to forget his best qualities and personal responsibilities.

While Jock recreates his personal history, he generally stops fantasising and thinking about politics. But after he looks back at his life, he finds that he can connect aspects of his life together, and analyse the historical development of his sexual fantasies. When he imagines trapping a confident woman who 'is corrupted into enjoying her bondage and trapping others into it. I did not notice that this was the story of my own life. I avoided doing so by insisting on the *femaleness* of the main character' (p.193).

Jock finds that:

> The parts of the story which came to excite me most were not the physical humiliations but the moment when the trap starts closing and the victim feels the torture of being in two minds: wanting to believe, struggling to believe, that what is happening cannot be happening, can only happen to someone else. And I was right to be excited by that moment because it is the moment when, with courage, we change things. (p.194)

Jock never lets his characters find the courage to change. He recognises that Janine and the others are not as helpless as they feel, and could assert themselves, but they do not. He declares that Janine:

> is not used to acting boldly, she finds it easier to pretend Max is honest and decent, hoping her act will make him more so, and thus he drives her into the mire. My fancies keep reliving that moment of torture for Janine because I have never fully faced it in my own life (p.194).

Jock has stuck just at the moment of realisation that he has put himself into a trap.

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[205] 'Hegel says somewhere that all great historic facts and personages occur twice. [...] He forgot to add: "Once as tragedy, and again as farce."', Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, intro. by Eric Hass, trans. by Daniel De Leon (New York: New York Labor News, 1951, (1897)). Orig. pub. *Die Revolution*, 2 (Spring-March 1852).

Up until this moment, Jock refuses to admit that he has had to dehumanise himself in order to let his employers exploit him. He can only continue to stay trapped in his job and vision of the world by pretending that he is trapping and exploiting other people. His moment of selfish cowardice at eighteen is the history which he is forced to keep reliving as the darkest form of farce.

Jock's re-examination of his life leads him to draw new conclusions about its development. When he learns that Helen lied to get him to marry her, he is shocked to discover that he has built his picture of the world on imaginary foundations. This revelation leaves him in turmoil:

> If Helen lied to me then twelve years of marriage were built on falsehood and the past stops being solid. I can put up with a lot of present misery if it is solidly based, but if I am wrong about my past WHO AM I? If the reality I believed in is wrong, how can I right it? What solid truths can we find in our mistaken heads? (*J*, p.329)

He built a failed marriage on false, selfish foundations, but now realises that Helen did not marry him out of desperation and duty, but because she loved him (p.333). The consequences of his choices become less acceptable as he discovers that he based these decisions upon flawed ideas.

As Jock's vision of the world disintegrates, he must rebuild his life and world. He has to change his 'paradigm: that complex of interlinked attitudes *through which* we see the world and which gives it meaning'.[206] Charlton quotes Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory that:

> If good or bad willing changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world, not the facts; not the things that can be expressed in language.
>
> In brief, the world must thereby become quite another. It must so to speak wax or wane as a whole.[207]

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[206] Charlton, 'The World Must Become Quite Another', p.40.

[207] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, intro. by Bernard Russell, trans. by F.P. Ramsey (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1922), 6.43, p.185. Orig. pub. (Germany: 1921).

Jock must reshape every aspect of his life by changing his own boundaries. This change will lead to a world which is physically the same, but which will be different in every other respect.

By pushing his boundaries outward Jock ceases to see himself trapped in a claustrophobic and unchanging realm. If he now sees himself in a limitless sphere, with endless possibilities, this will automatically change his relationship with other people, events and himself. On the strength of an extract from the first part of the novel, Anderson and Norquay suggest that Jock is 'a fairly narrow-minded, unsympathetic character' who alienates readers.[208] But Gray claims that 'the social and sexual alienation of him is *not* incurable. I want to show that'.[209]

By the end of the night, Jock is able to remember his 'one single brave good unselfish action' (*J*, p.334): when he stopped the deranged Hislop from viciously beating another boy. He also writes a letter of resignation from his job and decides that he is now free to do what ever he wants with the rest of his life. He does not make any firm plan, but suddenly sees a huge number of alternative possibilities, as long as he is brave enough to act.

Marshall Walker considers that:

> It is McLeish's victory that, in the end, he triumphs over the power of his own imagination and re-enters the real world in which responsibly willed private life comes first. The text wins over its antibodies and the new story of Jock McLeish is ready to begin.[210]

Although Jock does say 'I will not squander myself in fantasies; I will think to a purpose, think harder' (*J*, p.340) he is not rejecting the imagination. In fact, Jock's change of heart is only possible because of a great effort of the imagination.

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[208] Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay, 'Interview with Alasdair Gray', *Cencrastus* 13, Summer 1983, 6-10 (p.8).
[209] Gray, in Anderson and Norquay, *Cencrastus*, p.9.
[210] Walker, 'Process of Jock McLeish', p.45.

Without imagining an alternative universe, Jock would not have been able to leave his old one.

What Jock triumphs over is the perversion of his imagination, which prevented him from changing. Immediately after declaring he will not lose himself in fantasies, he returns to his fantasy about Janine. Janine has a limited amount of freedom but remains in her exploitative world, although Jock promises to be 'gentle' and 'kind' to her (*J*, p.341). Jock does not abandon his fantasies, but changes to his dreams reflect his new character.

The novel stops before showing Jock turning down any specific path. This mirrors the process at the start of the novel. At the beginning Jock is anonymous, and could be anybody. But all possibilities are gradually excluded until he is limited to being himself. At the end, although his past is fixed, his present limitations, especially his job, are stripped away until he truly has the anonymity he craved. This anonymity, however, is not a sad escape from reality, but represents a hopeful pause before Jock starts to become a new person.

1982, Janine focuses on the inadequacies of cynical acquiescence to the Postmodern condition, and the genuine possibilities of change. But the novel does not weaken its emphasis by trying to point out in more detail which paths are more positive than others do. The power of the novel lies in pointing out that despite the complexities and harsh nature of the world, it is never too late to try to attempt to overcome alienation and forge new connections.

1982, Janine shows a man coming to terms with the Postmodern condition. Jock is trapped in a nightmare present of his own making, from the failures of the past. This nightmare will kill him if he does not escape it. In order to escape the eternal present he has to want to change and must revisit the past to relive his

mistakes. Remembering the radically disruptive events of the past is the only way that Jock can come to a new understanding of himself. Unless he comes to terms with his failures, he will never be able to change and turn towards to the future.

REIMAGINING THE FUTURE

Postmodern literature negotiates the uncertainty of the eternal present by using that present. Rather than artificially trying to impose an ordered solution upon contemporary experience, these texts dramatise the struggle to make sense of this present. *Midnight's Children* and *1982, Janine* describe characters' self-conscious attempts to make sense of their presents by recreating their pasts. Saleem and Jock express post-Enlightenment doubts and disillusionment with traditional history, while paradoxically being unable to cope with meaninglessness. But their presents are shown to be the consequence of their pasts and their attempts to reject their pasts are shown to be both futile and destructive.

Saleem and Jock cannot escape their present moments, but the narratives of their attempts to find new forms of history become in themselves Postmodern versions of history. They fully explore the uncertainty and multiplicity of the Postmodern condition, and while expressing their uncertain present, the novels come to make the present itself the missing connection with the past, and a new form of history. By describing the need to remember and imagine the past in the explicit context of the Postmodern present, these texts create a new, authentically Postmodern historical connection between the past and the present. Our new history is the story of our need for a history that we cannot imagine properly, but from which we cannot escape.

The reconnection of the past and present leads to new possibilities for the future. Postmodern novels are reluctant to speculate about the form of such a future. In *Lanark* and *Midnight's Children,* Lanark and Saleem die but their narratives end in some hope for society. They both see hope for the future residing in their sons, the next generation, and the 'infinite possibilities' (*IH*, p.16) of their societies. Rushdie attempts to convey this positive idea through the 'multitudinous' form and the teeming narrative of *Midnight's Children*, which 'constantly throws up new stories' (p.16).

In *1982, Janine* Jock survives his own battle with the present and the past to face the future. Jock has a determination to do something new and thinks of many possible futures but does not commit himself to any particular plan by the end of the novel. The text does not try to circumscribe the shape of the future, by imposing forms from the past upon it. Postmodern novels tend to concentrate upon the struggles of the present in order to free the future from both restrictive traditional visions and the paralysing present. The future finally emerges as the direct product of the past and present, but we can also begin to imagine it as something radically different.

CONCLUSION:

POSTMODERN LITERATURE AND UNCERTAINTY

Postmodern literature is a set of responses to the uncertainty generated by the Legitimation Crisis of the twentieth century. People no longer have faith in the Enlightenment metanarratives that once justified Western society; consequently, incredulity towards all metanarratives and uncertainty characterise Postmodern society. Yet the Enlightenment metanarratives of liberal rationalism have not disappeared, despite their discrediting and conflicting with alternative narratives. They still operate unconsciously, or mechanically, within society, if only because no other grand narrative has replaced them.

Postmodern literature, including the works of Alasdair Gray and Salman Rushdie, attempts to negotiate this situation, trying to find new ways of representing aspects of an ever changing and disorienting world, without falsely simplifying it. Lyotard describes a Postmodern writer or artist as being:

> in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the character of an *event*.[1]

To cover the complexities that make up the Postmodern would be impossible for only one novel. Therefore *Lanark*, *1982*, *Janine*, *Something Leather*, *A History Maker*, *Poor Things*, *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*

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[1] Lyotard, 'Answering the Question', p.81.

and *The Moor's Last Sigh* each try to establish their own unique parameters, by which they can be judged, and each has their own context.

Because Postmodern novels are engaged with our rapidly changing and complicated world, they tend to approach it through debates, ambiguities and uncertainty, rather than conclusions. But they do more than passively describe the situations they address. By staging the important debates of their societies, novels can become forums for discussion, actively highlighting and shaping those debates through interaction with their readers. The boundaries of our thoughts and our residual values are highlighted by the controversies surrounding Postmodern novels that examine the most emotionally charged subjects, such as pornography and religion.

The discrediting of Enlightenment metanarratives and the alienating effects of relentless capitalist development have caused a crisis of history, and the impression of an eternal present. Without an imaginative appreciation of progress connecting the present to the past, we have lost our sense of historical change, and with this a sense of the future. Postmodern literature constantly explores the crisis of history and our ahistorical present, in various attempts to reanimate a perception of difference and establish new imaginative connections with the past and the future.

Postmodern literature is characterised by its incredulity concerning metanarratives and exploration of uncertainty, not by stylistic or philosophical unity. It encompasses an enormous and diverse range of works, and any theory that attempts to describe it has to acknowledge the looseness and breadth of the alliance in its reading. Additionally, Postmodernism is still developing and another movement has not yet succeeded it. Therefore, all theories about

Postmodern literature and society have to be self-consciously provisional, recognising that Postmodernism can still metamorphose.

The Postmodern condition still characterises our late-twentieth century society, and Postmodern texts are still being produced. Rushdie's latest novel, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*,[2] continues his Postmodern exploration into uncertainty. The novel uses Indian rock legends Ormus and Vina's lack of trust in each other's faithfulness to suggest that 'everything is provisional'.[3] Rushdie found that the:

> provisionality in their relationship became [...] a way of exploring the uncertainty of the rest of life. I mean, it's called *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* because the ground beneath their feet moves; it's not certain. And we also, I suggest, stand on such shaking ground.[4]

Earthquakes become physical expressions of Postmodern uncertainty in the novel. Seismic activity is on the increase, possibly as the result of new weapons. In a destabilised world, earthquakes change geological and political landscapes, literally undermining some countries and isolating others. But the earthquakes are also caused by 'two worlds in collision' (*GBHF*, p.326).

The two worlds are 'the realms of fancy and of fact' (p.388). Ormus's damaged eye looks into the other dimension. He sees that 'the barriers between the world of dreams and the waking world, between the spheres of the actual and the imagined, are breaking down' (p.388). He writes songs celebrating the 'the approach of chaos, [...] the collapse of all walls, boundaries, restraints. They describe [...] two universes [...] striving to become one, destroying each other in the effort' (p.390). However, it is not clear which universe is factual.

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[2] Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (London: Cape, 1999). References hereafter to *GBHF* in the text.
[3] Salman Rushdie, in Francine Stock, 'Salman Rushdie and the Ground Beneath his Feet', *Arena*, BBC 2, 11.20pm, Thursday 22 April 1999.
[4] Ibid., *Arena*, BBC 2.

The story is set in a slightly different universe from our own. President Kennedy is not assassinated (*GBHF*, p.185), wins another term (p.265), Nixon is never elected and *The Watergate Affair* is only a what-if thriller (p.280). Fictional authors are real, Kilgore Trout writes science fiction and Pierre Ménard writes *Don Quixote* (p.280), while 'Satisfaction' is by John Lennon not the *Rolling Stones* (p.264). Our world is revealed as the other dimension colliding with the fictional world of the novel (pp.350-51). On one level, only the 'real' world can survive the end of the narrative, but our reading of the novel changes it.

The collisions in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are also metaphors for our uncertainty:

> The world is irreconcilable, it doesn't add up, but if we cannot agree with ourselves that it does, we can't make judgements or choices. We can't live. [...] [T]he contradictions in the real have become so glaring, so inescapable, that we're all learning to take them in our stride. We go to bed thinking—just a random example—that Mr. N—— M—— or Mr. G—— A—— is a notorious terrorist, and wake up hailing him as the savior of his people. (pp.351-52)

The Ground Beneath Her Feet presents incompatible visions of our world as wholly different dimensions. These alternative worlds exist in the same space and physically clash in the novel, while different philosophies, religions, politics and opinions co-exist uncomfortably in our world. There is no complete way of looking at the world, no certainty, but we have to have some vision of the world to survive.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet suggests that the contemporary cult of celebrity is an expression of our need for meaning and 'ex altation' (p.19) in our unsatisfactory, uncertain world. The novel constructs and deconstructs the myth of fame by using ancient Greek and Indian myths, exposing the present through the past, demonstrating the all-too-human nature of our idols. By the end of the novel,

the narrator, Rai, sees a parallel between the deaths of Ormus and Vina, and the withdrawal of the ancient gods.

All mythologies reach a point where:

> the gods no longer share their lives with mortal men and women, they die or wither away or retire. [...] This, the myths hint, is what a mature civilisation is: a place where the gods stop jostling and shoving us [...] leaving us free to do our best or worst without their autocratic meddling. (*GBHF*, pp.574-75)

Ormus and Vina represented the 'mythic' for Rai, and after their withdrawal 'what remains is ordinary human life' (p.575). Rai discovers that in an uncertain world, all he needs is his family. He defiantly declares 'fall away, if you must, contemptuous earth; melt, rocks, and shiver, stones. I'll stand my ground, right here. This I've discovered and worked for and earned. This is mine' (p.575). Rushdie suggest that 'ordinary human life' is 'the ground beneath your feet, if you like, and that is very provisional, you know that there's no guarantee'.[5]

The Ground Beneath Her Feet suggests that we have to take responsibility for our presents and futures. We have to work for our 'fragile, precarious' personal and general happiness (*GBHF*, p.354), not give in to desperate, false certainty. Rai argues that 'in a time of constant transformation', the 'joy that comes with belief, with certainty [...] is the prisoner's surrender to his chains' (p.353). While it is hard to cope with our Postmodern condition, it is essential that we do not hide from its problems, in order not to give in to stagnation, intolerance and uncertainty.

Postmodern literature engages with the alienating uncertainty that characterises our Postmodern society. Novels dramatise society's debates, and through this become active participants in those dialogues. The debate format enables

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[5] Rushdie, in Stock, *Arena*, BBC 2.

Postmodern literature to tackle many aspects of Postmodern society, and suggest many different solutions. However, they do not create new metanarratives, but legitimise a tense and provisional relationship with society that helps people to live in an uncertain world but not surrender to it.

In the light of the continual production of Postmodern texts and uncertainty of the Postmodern condition, it would be interesting to look in greater detail at the constant development of Postmodern literature over the last thirty years with reference to the changing nature of Postmodern uncertainty. The uncertainty that generated Postmodern texts in the late sixties had a different character from that of the uncertainties of the seventies or eighties. The end of the cold war meant that the uncertainties of the nineties have been different again, as the world has moved beyond familiar, cold war ideological divisions. If we examine how Postmodern literature has engaged with each metamorphosing moment of uncertainty, it might help us gain an understanding of the changing relationship of literature with society, and of how Postmodern literature might develop in the future.

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